

10¢ PER
COPY

SATURDAY NOV. 16

BY THE \$4.00
YEAR

ALL-STORY WEEKLY



*When Her Second
Mate Revolted*

An Extra
by Husband

Octavus Roy Cohen and J.U. Giesy
Authors of "The Reckless Age," etc.

Yankee Ways Win Out



MILITARY No 7



There's a "get-there" quality in American ways—a punch, an "edge", like the edge of the famous **GEM Blade** that gets there when a soldier or sailor wants a quick, comfortable, smooth shave. The little **GEM Khaki Service Outfit** is already the constant companion of our boys, in the cantonments, in the trenches, on the ships—compact, light-weight, dependable, durable—winning out everywhere on its merits.

GEM DAMASKEENE RAZOR

**Khaki
Service
Outfit**

*The Gem way has won out for
over a quarter of a century—
Millions of Gems in use today.*

**\$1.00 GEM
Outfit
Complete**

Outfit with
Trench Mirror \$1.35

Add 50c. to above prices, for Canada

Gem Cutlery Company, Inc., New York
Canadian Branch, 591 St. Catherine St., W., Montreal

**Complete
Compact**



The Old
Way

Factory

Branch
House

Salesman

Agent

You

Two Ways of Selling the OLIVER Typewriter

The New
Way

Factory

You

The New Way Saves You \$51

THE OLD WAY: It cost \$51 to sell you a typewriter. Rents of offices in many cities, salaries, commissions and other costly practices—each demanded its share.

THE NEW WAY: We ship from the factory to you, eliminating all wastes. This saves the \$51, and it now goes to you. A \$100 Oliver costs you but \$49. Why waste \$51 by buying typewriters the old way?

These Facts Will Save You Money

Note that this advertisement is signed by The Oliver Typewriter Company itself. It is not the advertisement of a concern offering second-hand or rebuilt Oliver of an earlier model. The Oliver Typewriter Company makes only new machines.

The old way, as explained above, was wasteful and wrong. So people have welcomed our new economical plan and our output has multiplied.

Until January 1st we offer for \$49 the exact machine which formerly sold at \$100. After that the price will be \$57, due to increased cost of production. This is our Model Nine, the finest typewriter we ever built. It has the universal keyboard, so any stenographer may turn to it without the slightest hesitation and do better work more easily.

And it has dozens of superiorities not found elsewhere. For instance, it has far fewer parts. This means longer wear, and naturally few or no repairs.

This Oliver Nine is a 20-year development. If any typewriter is worth \$100, it is this splendid model.

It is the same machine used by great concerns such as United States Steel Corporation, Baldwin Locomotive Works, National City Bank of New York, Pennsylvania Railroad, Otis Elevator Company and hosts of others. Such concerns demand the best. Yet they are not wasteful.

FREE TRIAL

Merely clip the coupon below, asking us to send a free-trial Oliver. We do not ask a penny down. When the Oliver arrives, try it out. Put it to every test. Compare its workmanship.

Then, when you are convinced that the Oliver Nine is all we claim, and you prefer it, pay us at the rate of \$3 per month.

During the free trial, you are not under the slightest obligation to buy. If you wish to return it, we even refund the transportation charges.

Used typewriters accepted in exchange at a fair valuation.

Or, if you would rather know more about our plans before ordering a free-trial Oliver, check the coupon for our amazing book entitled, "The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy." We accompany it with our beautifully illustrated catalog describing the Oliver Nine.

Cut out the coupon now and check it now. Remember the price advances on January 1st to \$57.

The Oliver Typewriter Co.

739 Oliver Typewriter Building
Chicago, Ill.

(815)

Act Quickly—While This Price Lasts

Mail
Today

Was
\$100

Now
\$49



Canadian Price
\$62.65 until
Jan. 1st, 1919

THE OLIVER TYPEWRITER COMPANY
739 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

☐ Ship me a new Oliver Nine for five days' free inspection. If I keep it, I will pay \$49 at the rate of \$3 per month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for.

My shipping point is..... This does not place me under any obligation to buy. If I choose to return the Oliver, I will ship it back at your expense at the end of five days.

☐ Do not send a machine until I order it. Mail me your book—"The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy," your de luxe catalog and further information.

Name

Street Address

City State

This coupon not valid unless mailed and postmarked before midnight, December 31, 1918.

On Jan. 1st the Price Advances to \$57

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOLUME XC

NUMBER 4



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THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President

RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary

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“Your Chance Has Come!”

“Jones, you’ve been with us a good many years. You haven’t gone ahead very fast because you lacked special training. But when we entered the war you knew the younger men would go and you took up a course with the International Correspondence Schools. Oh, yes I’ve known it from the first and I’ve watched your splendid progress. And now your chance has come. Watson goes into the service on Monday. You take his place—with full charge of the department.”

In these days, when men are being called to the colors from office, store, shop and factory, important places must be filled quickly and the boss wants trained men to fill them. You men of middle age, you who for one reason or another cannot go, this is *your* chance to serve your employer and your country and at the same time win promotion and a salary that will mean more comforts and happiness for those dependent on you.

Don’t let the opportunities you have longed for slip by. Get ready *now*. Train for the job ahead. You can do it—in spare time—through the International Correspondence Schools.

For 27 years men of ambition with I. C. S. help have been making spare hours the stepping stones to successful careers. Last year more than 5,000 reported that their studies had won for them advancement and increased salaries. And over 100,000 others, all over America, are getting ready in the I. C. S. way for the better positions that surely await them.

Join them! All you need is just ordinary brains, the will to do, and the firm resolve to think ahead of the job you now hold. The I. C. S. are ready to make the rest easy. Make *your* start, take the step right now. Mark and mail this coupon.

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BOX 2189, SCRANTON, PA.

Explain, without obligating me, how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject, before which I mark X.

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| ☐ Electric Lighting and Railways | ☐ ADVERTISING |
| ☐ Electric Wiring | ☐ Window Trimmer |
| ☐ Telegraph Engineer | ☐ Show Card Writer |
| ☐ Telephone Work | ☐ Sign Painter |
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| ☐ CIVIL ENGINEER | ☐ Cert. Public Accountant |
| ☐ Surveying and Mapping | ☐ TRAFFIC MANAGER |
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| ☐ Marine Engineer | ☐ GOOD ENGLISH |
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| ☐ Contractor and Builder | ☐ Mathematics |
| ☐ Architectural Draftsman | ☐ CIVIL SERVICE |
| ☐ Concrete Builder | ☐ Railway Mail Clerk |
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| ☐ CHEMIST | ☐ Poultry Raising ☐ French |
| | ☐ Italian |

Name
 Present
 Occupation
 Street
 and No.
 City State



Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needful for the home, the farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

"A New Force in Business" is a booklet that tells how to advertise successfully in the Classified Department of The Munsey Magazines. Mailed anywhere on request.

Classified Advertising Rates in The Munsey Magazines:

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Munsey's Magazine	\$1.50	\$4.00
The Argosy	1.50	less 3 per cent cash discount.
Al-Story Weekly	1.00	
Railroad Man's Magazine	1.00	

Dec. 14th Argosy Combination Forms Close Nov. 16th

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AMERICAN MILITARY STYLES ARE ALL THE RAGE in men's tailored to measure suits this season. Easiest to sell; everybody wants them. Far ahead of all others in real class and beauty. Lowest prices—less than common ready-made suits. Our agents are earning money. You can earn \$10 daily. Send for full particulars, terms and sample book of styles and patterns. American Woolen Mills Co., Dept. 901, Chicago, Ill.

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Agents Earn \$50 to \$125 Weekly selling Comfort Indoor Closets. Every home without sewerage needs one. They are odorless, sanitary, germ proof. Easily installed. Write for particulars. Comfort Chemical Closet Co., 5 Factories Bldg., Toledo, Ohio.

Men and Women Make 300% Profit. Trial order—10 large Patriotic Pictures. "Me Und Gott." "Yankee Soldier's Dream," and 30 copies 15 Song Ballads, all for \$1.00. Particulars Free. Le Roy Music Co., 405 McVickers Theatre, Chicago.

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IDEAS WANTED. THEY BRING WEALTH IF PATENTED. Send postal for Needed Inventions, List of Patent Buyers and Guide Book. Tells How to Secure Patent through our Credit Plan. Randolph & Co., 630 F Street, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS—Write for How to Obtain a Patent, list of Patent Buyers, and Inventions Wanted. \$1,000,000 in prizes offered for inventions. Send sketch for free opinion as to patentability. Our Four Books sent free upon request. Patents advertised Free. Victor J. Evans Co., Patent Attys., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES; \$10 to \$500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. Producers League, 388 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

AUTO ACCESSORIES

FORDS START EASY IN COLD WEATHER with our new 1919 carburetors. Thirty-four miles per gallon. Use cheapest gasoline or half kerosene. Increased power. Styles for any motor. Very slow on high. Attach it yourself. Big profits to agents. Money back guarantee; 30 days trial. Air Friction Carburetor Co., 519 Madison, Dayton, Ohio.

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BE AN AUTO OR TRACTOR EXPERT. Unlimited opportunity for civil and Government Work. 5000 successful graduates. Write at once for our big free catalog. Cleveland Auto School, 1819 E. 24th Street, Cleveland, Ohio.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

RICH HARDWOOD LAND IN MICHIGAN. Grain, poultry, fruit, stock. Big yields. Less labor. 10, 20, 40, 80 acres; \$15 to \$30. Easy payments. No taxes to settlers for five years. No commissions. Big booklet free. Swigart Land Company, Y1245 First National Bank Building, Chicago, Ill.



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TO MEASURE

ONLY \$2.95

1½ Year's Satisfaction or Money Back

Fine hand tailoring. Choice of many snappy, smart fabrics for dress or business wear. You save one half. Every penny back quick any time you are not well pleased.

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No strings to this offer. Not a penny extra for anything. We even prepay all postage and express.

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Classy lapel pin free with your first order to show you are a regular agent. Send quick—supply limited.

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Your friends will buy on sight at our low prices. Our agents get up to \$16 a week cash for spare time. You can do it easy. Write quick for BIG, new sample outfit to choose from, and our astonishing offer FREE. Do it NOW.

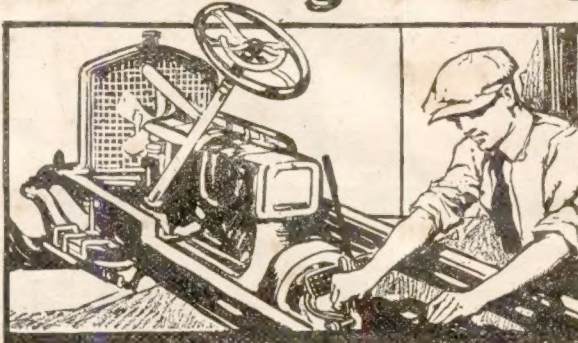
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CHICAGO TAILORS ASSOCIATION

Dept. E-445, 515 South Franklin Street, CHICAGO

Earned \$6000 Last Year—Rebuilding Autos!

"I ALWAYS had a craze for tinkering with motor cars—yet I never thought that I could turn this knack into a good income. Then I opened my eyes to what hundreds of other men were doing. They were buying up old cars and rebuilding them. They were opening up public garages and running repair shops. I made inquiries. I found out how my friends did these things. I followed their example. Last year I earned \$6000. This year I expect to make more, because automobile owners are making their old cars last them through the period of the war, and this means a lot more work and profit for men in my line of business."



tomobile mechanic, repair man or chauffeur, you can climb far higher.

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You can prepare yourself speedily to become a skilled automobile mechanic. You can equip yourself to open your garage. A simple spare time reading course in Automobile Engineering opens the way to success to you—now!

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You can earn as much money as this man. You can turn your love for motor cars into cash. If you are already an au-

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Special Offer

Your purchase of these books brings you a Consulting Membership in the American Technical Society, which while valued at \$12.00, may prove to be worth hundreds of dollars to you. It entitles you to special information on subjects dealing with automobile construction and repair, or garage or shop management for the period of a year. You may ask as many questions as you wish.

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Mail free inspection coupon. Just your name and address on the coupon brings the 5 valuable volumes to you express charges collect for 7 days' free trial. We cannot guarantee that this little price will hold. Your opportunity is now. Mail the coupon at once, while this offer is open to you.

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Help Win the War

BY STEADY WORK
FULL TIME
SIX DAYS A WEEK

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W. B. WILSON
Sec'y of Labor

The American Technical Society

Dept. A1088, CHICAGO, ILL.

THE AMERICAN TECHNICAL SOCIETY
Dept. A1088, CHICAGO, ILL.

Please send me the 5-volume set "Automobile Engineering" for 7 days' free examination, express charges collect. If I decide to buy, I will send \$2.00 within 7 days and the balance at \$2.00 a month until \$17.50 has been paid. Then you send me a receipt showing that the \$25 set of books and the \$12.00 consulting membership are mine and fully paid for. If I think that I can get along without the books after the 7 days' trial I will return them at your expense.

Name.....
Address.....
Reference.....



Tobacco Habit BANISHED

in 48 to 72 Hours

Immediate Results

Trying to quit the tobacco habit unaided is a losing fight against heavy odds, and means a serious shock to your nervous system. So don't try it! Make the tobacco habit quit you. It will quit you if you will just take Tobacco Redeemer according to directions.

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Tobacco Redeemer contains no habit-forming drugs of any kind and is the most marvelously quick, absolutely scientific and thoroughly reliable remedy for the tobacco habit.

Not a Substitute

Tobacco Redeemer is in no sense a substitute for tobacco, but is a radical, efficient treatment. After finishing the treatment you have absolutely no desire to use tobacco again or to continue the use of the remedy. It quiets the nerves, and will make you feel better in every way. If you really want to quit the tobacco habit—get rid of it so completely that when you see others using it, it will not awaken the slightest desire in you—you should at once begin a course of Tobacco Redeemer treatment for the habit.

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A single trial will convince the most skeptical. Our legal, binding, money-back guarantee goes with each full treatment. If Tobacco Redeemer fails to banish the tobacco habit when taken according to the plain and easy directions, your money will be cheerfully refunded upon demand.

Let Us Send You Convincing Proof

If you're a slave of the tobacco habit and want to find a sure, quick way of quitting "for keeps" you owe it to yourself and to your family to mail the coupon below or send your name and address on a postal and receive our free booklet, and positive proof that Tobacco Redeemer will quickly free you from the habit.

Newell Pharmacal Company
Dept. 320, St. Louis, Mo.



Mail Coupon NOW for FREE Booklet

NEWELL PHARMACAL CO.,
Dept. 320, St. Louis, Mo.

Please send, without obligating me in any way, your free booklet regarding the tobacco habit and proof that Tobacco Redeemer will positively free me from the tobacco habit.

Name

Street and No.

Town..... State



Advanced Because They Knew Traffic Management

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Two years after beginning the LaSalle Course in Interstate Commerce and Traffic Management he was appointed General Freight and Passenger Agent.

He said that it would probably have taken him 8 or 10 years to make this advance if he had depended merely upon work and experience.

LaSalle experts helped him to reach the top in the space of months.

T. J. Wright, an Illinois member, reports three promotions since taking the course.

H. S. Watson, of Michigan, figures his increased earning capacity at 400%.

Fred Hoffman, an Ohio member, reports 500 per cent profit on his investment in one year.

Among the many LaSalle trained men who are now Traffic Managers or Experts on Interstate Commerce are:

Wm. Ritchie, Vice-President and Traffic Manager, Philadelphia Lawn Mower Co.

F. E. Coombs, Traffic Director, Twin City Traffic League, Benton Harbor, Mich.

F. E. Hamilton, Traffic Manager, Retail Merchants Association of Canada.

Mr. Hamilton says: "I cannot speak too highly of this institution. The course is up-to-date, authentic, and easily understood. My only regret is that I did not take it up five years ago."

Throughout the country you will find LaSalle trained men holding important positions in the traffic departments of large railway and industrial concerns or acting as Interstate Commerce Counsellors for manufacturers, chambers of commerce or towns and cities that are large shipping centers.

Other men who started at the same time or before, under the same conditions, are still drawing small salaries and holding obscure positions.

That's the difference between the man who trains and the man who expects promotion simply through faithful performance and his unaided efforts.

In which class are you?

If you have let time slip by without preparing for the higher positions, begin your training now. Decide that within a year you will be on the way to one of these bigger, better positions.

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War conditions and our enormous foreign trade have created a rich field for men who know the technicalities of transportation and the laws of Interstate Commerce. Trained traffic men are wanted by all large shippers—railroads, manufacturers, municipalities, and chambers of commerce. The Traffic Manager, in fact, holds one of the most important positions in business today. He is the man who can save thousands of dollars for his house by his specialized knowledge. To him is intrusted the actual distribution of the company's product by the most direct and economical channels.

The man who can handle a job like this doesn't have to stand in line or wait for a chance. The opportunity is always at hand for him.

Train By Mail Under La Salle Experts

If you want to become a Traffic Manager, you can train in your own home by using only your spare time.

You can get complete instruction in every branch of the profession from men who have held or are holding the highest positions in the field.

They will explain every point concerning Freight Rates, Classifications, Tariffs, Bills of Lading, Routing, Claims, Demurrage, Express Rates, Ocean Traffic, R. R. Organization, Reg-

ulation and Management, Laws of Carriers, Interstate Commerce Rulings, etc., etc.

How many men are expert on even one of these subjects?

Your enrollment in our institution not only brings you this specialized knowledge but gives you free the privilege of our Consulting Service which brings to you the advice of our experts in any department whenever you need help on some special business problem.

LaSalle membership makes available to you the service of an organization of over 800 people, including a staff of 300 business experts, professional men, text writers, instructors.

No Large Fees

To get this training and service does not call for a large outlay of money. It does not take time from your present employment. The instruction is entirely by mail. You get your training in the hours not required in the position you are now holding.

Not only are the fees small, but they can be paid on our easy terms—a little every month.

LaSalle training in Interstate Commerce and Railway Traffic is thus within the reach of every ambitious man even though his present income is limited.

Send the Coupon and Get All the Facts

Your request will bring complete information. We will tell you just what the course offers in every detail; all about the opportunities open to trained traffic men. We will also send you our book, "Ten Years' Promotion In One" which has shown thousands of men the short road to promotion. If you are ambitious to rise—if you want to enter a paying and un-crowded field of business, get these facts. Sending the coupon implies no obligation upon you. Mail it today.

LASALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY

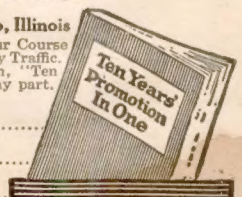
"The World's Greatest Extension University"
Dept. 1132-IC Chicago, Illinois

Please send me your catalog and full information on your Course and Consulting Service in Interstate Commerce and Railway Traffic. Also a copy of your valuable book for the ambitious man, "Ten Years' Promotion In One." This without obligation on my part.

Name.....

Address.....

Present Position.....



DIAMONDS WATCHES ON CREDIT

MAKE THIS A DIAMOND, WATCH AND JEWELRY CHRISTMAS

Our Diamonds are distinctive in beauty and brilliancy. A Genuine Diamond is the best investment into which you can put your money. It constantly increases in value and lasts forever.

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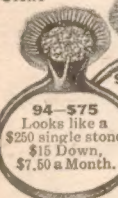
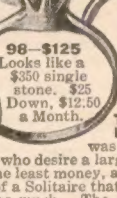
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An Extra Husband by Octavus Roy Cohen and J.U. Giesy

Authors of "The Triple Cross," "The Matrimoniae," "The Reckless Age," etc.

CHAPTER I.

A GREEK GOD.

THE door of Druer's Lunch-Room and Dairy Café opened and a little man entered. He did it spryly, with an air as if he did everything he undertook in the same way. His almost china-blue eyes, keen and bright behind tortoise-shell-rimmed glasses, swept the line of tables down one side of the room opposite the counter and its line of stools, in evident search for a place.

Spying a vacant table they fastened upon it with a regard so direct that it seemed to establish an immediate bond between the little man and the unoccupied spot, drawing him toward it very much as though he were being reeled in at the end of an invisible line.

He reached it, removed his hat, revealing a sparse thatch of what is sometimes called mouse-colored hair, hung the hat on a metal hook, and sat down with a pursing out of his two thin, almost colorless lips. His figure, slender, not over five feet six inches in height, was clad in a suit of excellent material, but striking check design, which

seemed more fitted to youth than the form of this palpably middle-aged man.

Otherwise he gave the impression of nervous rather than physical strength. It showed in the lines of his face, the angle of his firm jaw beneath his tightly held mouth, the tapping of the fingers of one rather bony hand on the cloth of the table as he waited to be served.

A waitress in black and white—dress, collars, cuffs and tiny starched apron, slid up to his table. The customer gave his order and she slid away. He drew a copy of a paper from a pocket. It was the *Dalton Evening Dispatch*. Just where Dalton is doesn't matter in the least. There are dozens of towns like it, municipalities of possibly fifty thousand inhabitants, scattered all over the land. And in any one of them can be found places like Druer's Café. He propped the paper against a vinegar-cruet and began to read. He kept on reading until his meal was served, whereupon he folded the paper, put it back in his pocket, and began to eat. He had come in rather early, and by degrees, as he proceeded with his repast, the café began to fill.

All at once the little man laid down his

knife and fork. He straightened in his chair. Back of their lenses his china-blue eyes appeared to widen swiftly and fix themselves on the occupant of a table one station removed from that at which their owner sat.

In every way he was the antithesis of the man in the checked suit. Six feet at least, and built in perfect proportion, with a width of shoulder which spoke of proportionate strength, and a regularity of feature along almost classic lines seldom met with in a man. There was the straight brow seeming to run on in a continuation of its lines into the truly Grecian nose. There were the cleanly chiseled lips, the correct indenture between the lower lip and the bulb of the chin. There were the rather heavy brows above the well-set eyes, the well-formed occiput joining the strong pillar of the neck in just the way it should be joined. In fact, the individual might well have served as the model for some hero of the mythological age, for Apollo Belvedere, for Hermes, grown a trifle stout, or for a youthful Hercules.

For a moment after he had laid his knife and fork on his plate, the little man watched the other ply his own utensils with a pair of large, well-molded, strength-hinting hands. One could hardly feel surprised that he should do it. The contrast in their physique was marked enough to excuse his staring, not even taking into account the other's most unusual type of masculine pulchritude. In the mere act there was nothing to excite surprise; but the surprising thing was the expression which spread from the china-blue eyes over the whole of the little man's face.

He looked, startled, shocked, almost aghast. One would best describe his expression perhaps as that a man might wear if he met a ghost. There was something of terror about it, something of a swift and incredulous belief. His tight lips relaxed. His hands actually gripped the edge of the table before him. His jaw threatened to sag. Suddenly he frowned, and seemed to catch himself up—to realize where he was. He took a long breath, picked up his knife and fork in a purely mechanical fashion, and laid them down again after a single

morsel had been transferred from his plate to his lips.

He reached into a pocket and produced a handkerchief. With a hand that shook the least bit, he drew this across his face and brow, on which had started tiny drops of moisture not warranted by the temperature of the room. Having mopped his face he put the kerchief away and resolutely took up his knife and fork for the second time to resume his meal. But he was pale, his appearance that of one who has met a numbing shock, and he ate slowly, with occasional watchful glances at the other man—quick, furtive glances, plainly calculated not to attract attention in any way—designed wholly to assure the watcher that the one he watched still maintained his place in the café.

In such fashion he continued until the large man, after disposing of a large meal in a short time, rose and walked to the cashier's desk to settle his score. Having observed him so far, the little man gave him no further attention, but rattled his cup against his saucer to attract the attention of the waitress who had served him first and ask that it be refilled.

While she was gone on the errand, he drew a folder from the inside-pocket of his coat and extracted therefrom a yellow-backed bill. This he held in his hand when the girl came back with his brimming cup.

"Young woman," he began in a rather crisp, though carefully lowered tone, the while he opened his hand just enough to expose what it contained; "do you know the name of the large man who sat at the second table beyond mine—the man who just left? I noticed that you served him as well as myself."

"Mr. Brodeur?" The girl glanced at the vacant chair and the soiled dishes she had not as yet cleared away. "Why, whatever do you want to know about him for, sir?"

"For—say ten dollars." Her interrogator showed a larger corner of the bill with an alluring X plainly engraved thereon. "You said his name is Brodeur, I think?"

"Yes, sir, it is. He's Mr. Eric Brodeur." The girl's eyes were on her questioner's hand now rather than his face. "He's been eating here for over a year."

"Then he lives in town?"

"Oh, yes, sir; he lives here."

"Just where?" There was a sudden importunate eagerness in the little man's tones. He even leaned a trifle forward, keeping his blue eyes fixed on the waitress's face. The hand which clutched the bill contracted slowly until the knuckles whitened the tight-stretched skin. Once more he appeared a man in the full grip of some emotional stress.

"Why—why, sir, he's got rooms over the racket store a little way down the street."

"All right. Thanks." Again the words were crisp. The hand, which held the bill shoved it under the edge of the saucer the girl had just set down. "Give me my check if you please. That's all."

The little man rose, reached down his hat, took the slip of paper on which she had scrawled a couple of figures and approached the cashier's desk. He took a toothpick from a bowl of the wooden articles on the counter and began chewing it in a rather nervous fashion as he waited for his change. When it was forthcoming, he gathered it up, thrust it into his pocket, and passed straight out of the door.

Outside, however, he paused, glancing up and down the street. Free of the observation of the diners in the café, a worried, haunted expression once more made itself visible. The manner in which he turned his eyes, first in one, then in another direction, was fully as furtive now as had been the glances he had cast at the man in the café, after his first appraising and somewhat gaping stare.

His lips moved. "It can't be," he muttered, as one who seeks to reassure himself. "It—can't be—not him—not right here in Dalton. And yet he looks like a Greek god, all right. I—I guess I'd better see him. I ought to find out."

Of course it was to be presumed that the little man knew exactly what he was talking about, though it would have been hard for any one else to even remotely guess, beyond the fact that it concerned Eric Brodeur, the comely young giant of the café, and himself. But now he nodded as though he had reached a decision, and once more turned his troubled light-blue eyes to right and

left. A flight of the imagination might have made the slanting lenses on either side of his nose seem a pair of twin search-lights seeking to pierce a fog—a mental fog; of course, since the little man was past all question very much perturbed.

"Now, where the devil is the racket store?" he inquired of himself. "That girl said it was down the street."

He turned quickly, so quickly that it was as though he whirled himself about and set off along the pavement in front of the abutting shops. It wasn't much of a thoroughfare, but it was Dalton's principal street. The shops were not very large or very impressive, but they were Dalton's best.

The little man paid them no attention, save to satisfy himself that they were not what he sought. He had been in Dalton before, and had a general notion of where the racket store might be found, though he had never been in it, or given it a previous thought. Even in his home town, he had not entered such a place in years, and his trips to Dalton, whenever required by business, had ever been of the briefest nature consistent with getting his business done. It had taken him longer to-day than it generally did, and he had decided to dine before taking a later train than usual. Because of that very fact he had entered Druer's Café, where the big man had been dining for over a year. He was thinking of that as he hurried along on his quest for the racket store.

He reached it at last. He knew well enough, in a general way, what it was, and when he came to a glass front, behind which were displayed a motley collection of tinware, confectionery, writing-pads, cheap millinery findings, garden utensils, and enameled kettles and pots, he paused and surveyed it, as one who had arrived at an appointed spot.

"If all that junk were dumped together it would make some considerable racket," he soliloquized, in an attempt to bolster a shaken nerve. "This must be *his* place." He emphasized the pronoun in a rather peculiar way.

He tilted back his head and directed his tortoise-shell-rimmed lenses at an angle of

some forty degrees above the rumble of domestic requirements behind the glass. Plainly he was looking for something he expected to find. And he found it without any protracted search.

It was an oblong board hung on a metal arm, affixed to the brink of the building on one side of a door, half wood and half glass. It was evidently placed where he who ran might read.

The small man read:

PALACE HOTEL

Good Rooms by the Day or Week.

Having read, he advanced and pushed the door before him. It swung back on a vista of steeply mounting stairs, covered with a worn linoleum, at the top of which an incandescent bulb diffused a nimbus of light.

He set his lips firmly, as one who has made up his mind to a definite course and began the ascent of the stairs.

At the top he came upon a stretch of red carpet running down a hall, a small desk fastened against a wall, supporting an open register with pen and ink, and a warm and somewhat close inner atmosphere. Over the desk was a small gong from the hammer of which depended a cord and handle. Back of it a card invited one to:

Ring Bell for the Landlady.

The newcomer inspected this and swept his glance about the spot, which plainly answered the requirements of the Palace Hotel for an office. For a moment he appeared to hesitate, and then went quickly toward the dangling cord, seized hold of the handle with a rather tense grip and evoked a sudden summons from the bell.

The brazen note had hardly died away when a door opened and a small, neat woman with graying hair appeared.

The little man watched as she approached. "Good evening," he remarked when she was quite near indeed. "Is the Greek god here?"

"The—who were you wanting to see?" The woman paused, she drew back a step

and regarded her questioner in a rather uncertain fashion, not so surprising indeed if one considered his excited demeanor and the nature of his words, as after an instant he seemed to realize himself.

Because he, too, appeared somewhat confused before the knowledge that he had spoken in the fashion of people when they think of one thing quite intently and mean to say something else, but find their tongue tricked into a sort of automatic action by their brain.

"I—er—beg your pardon," he resumed, with a shake of the head. "That wasn't what I meant to say at all. I should like to see Mr. Eric Brodeur, if he's here."

"Oh." The landlady nodded. "Mr. Brodeur." She smiled in a manner suggestive of relief and understanding. "He is an awfully handsome young man. Been with me nearly three years—"

"Three years!" There was tragedy in the little man's words.

"Why, yes, sir—" Once more the woman eyed him. "You know he's in business. He sells real estate. I think he just came in. I'll rap on his door and find out. What name shall I say?"

"No name. He doesn't know me. Just show me his door and I'll rap myself," the little man flashed out in reply as she half turned to put her words into effect.

"Right over there, sir." She pointed to a door, manifestly that of a front room, from its position at the forward end of the hall and the foot of a second flight of mounting stairs.

"Thanks." The one she directed, jerked himself around and strode toward it, lifted a hand and struck it against the wood in a series of quick, imperative blqws.

The door was opened almost at once by the large, young man of the café.

"Good evening. You're Eric Brodeur," the little man said, almost as though he dared the other to deny it.

"Why, yes."

"I—er—want to see you," the little man explained. "Saw you in the café where you ate just now, and asked them where you lived. I'm Jason Farnham, of Great Rapids. May I come in?"

"Certainly, if you wish to see me." The

young man threw back the door. Possibly he had heard of Farnham and possibly not, but he might have done so easily enough. Great Rapids was not so very far from Dalton, and at Great Rapids were the great Farnham mills, which made a brand of breakfast food known and eaten all over the land.

His caller darted inside in the same quick way in which he had entered Druer's for his evening meal. His eyes swept the room in the same quickly searching fashion they had adopted in looking for a table in the café. Swiftly they appraised the apartment, found it really a suite, lingered on the door of the bedroom for a second, and went on about the living-room in which he stood. They came to rest at last on the tenant, now closing the door. He had thrown off his coat and stood in trousers and shirt, the latter more fully exposing the depth of chest, the breadth of shoulder, all the powerful proportions of neck and torso that were his.

"Sit down, Mr. Farnham." Brodeur left the door and waved his visitor to a chair.

Farnham accepted it slowly, without once taking his glance from the other man's face. He was studying it—studying it closely, scrutinizing its every detail in an eager yet almost apprehensive way. "Brodeur," he suddenly spoke, "what color are your eyes?"

"Gray," said Eric Brodeur, in a tone of some surprise. He had not been unmindful of Farnham's intent inspection, and had remained standing while it continued.

"Gray," repeated his guest. "Er—would you mind turning your head—letting me see your profile again?" All at once the little man licked his almost colorless lips.

Brodeur complied. He turned his head slowly, giving a side view of his face. It came over him that Farnham was laboring under some sort of mental excitement, he couldn't, of course, tell what. An odd sense of puzzlement took him in its grip. The man's coming had been unexpected, and his method of opening the conversation was rather odd, to say the least. A slight, rather pulse-quickenning suspicion flashed up in Brodeur's brain. As he stood waiting his guest's next move he found himself

wondering if he were exactly sane. Then he became conscious that the man in the chair was speaking again, not so much to him as to himself.

"Gray eyes and light hair, sort of tawny—like a Viking of old might have worn when he dashed into the fray in his long ship, yelling 'Skoal' or whatever demnition thing it was they yelled when they dashed into the fray. Brodeur—have you ever been to sea?"

Brodeur took a long breath before he replied. Just what was the matter he couldn't decide, but this thing was queer. He wasn't alarmed. The little man was too small to excite any sense of fear in a man of his physical build, but he began to feel a trifle annoyed at what was rapidly coming to seem an unexplained, personal inquisition. "Not any more than I am at the present in regard to the object of your coming here like this," he said at last.

"Eh?" Farnham stared. Abruptly his lips relaxed. For a moment it looked as though he were about to smile. All at once he jerked his head. "Sit down, Brodeur—sit down. I'm rattled. That's what's the matter with me. I've been like that ever since I saw you first to-night. You see, you look like some one I never saw in my life. You look like a dead man, Brodeur. That's why seeing you there in Druer's Café sent me up in the air. Sit down and let's thresh it out."

As an explanation it was not an immense success. It left a lot to be desired. Just how he could resemble a man the other had never seen, and a dead man all at once, Brodeur in the first moment found himself unable to understand. Indeed, about all he could appreciate right then was that the little man had told the truth in saying he was rattled, and that his own appearance was seemingly the cause. "I'm very sorry that anything about me should have upset you, Mr. Farnham," he said rather stiffly, as he let himself down in a chair.

"It isn't that exactly." Once more Farnham shook his head. "You're physically perfect—a regular Greek god, Brodeur, but—" He paused, his light-blue eyes seemed to flash behind their lenses; his lips set themselves into a firm, an almost an-

tagonistic line—and his final words snapped out with the quick, incisiveness of a demand —“*is* Brodeur your name?”

“Is it what?” The words were an angry gasp. To Brodeur it seemed that now his unusual caller had overstepped the bounds of toleration, that he had reached and passed the limits of what might be expected to be permitted between men. Excited he might be, as he had said, must be indeed to explain his actions, his switching from Vikings to Greek gods in his comments on the appearance of his host; but not even the fact that he was “up in the air,” to use his own expression, could, in Eric’s estimation, excuse this impeachment of the name he had inherited and borne for some twenty-nine years with such honor as he could.

“See here, Farnham,” he went on, once more rising and towering above the little man, “just what do you mean in asking me if my name is—my name? What—”

“I mean is it your name or not?” Farnham drew back from the point he had raised not one whit.

“It is.” Brodeur put his hands on his hips and leaned forward, glaring at the other man. His position was very much that of a bulldog not wanting trouble, but set to guard something he had been given to defend.

“Thank God!” Farnham’s tone was that of a prayer of relief. He drew the kerchief he had used in the café and once more mopped his face. And once more the hand he used in the process shook in a visible fashion as he put the kerchief back into his pocket.

Brodeur relaxed. He straightened and went a step closer to the man he watched. There were lines of bewilderment in his face.

“See here, Mr. Farnham,” he began, “I don’t know just what is the trouble, or why my appearance seems to have upset you as it has. But my name is Brodeur, and I’ve never had any reason to doubt it in all my life.”

Farnham nodded. “It’s all right. It’s all right, Brodeur,” he said, and took a long breath. “I’m sure of it now. I don’t

doubt it, either. But—I’ve been thinking you might be my wife’s husband!”

CHAPTER II.

“RESURRECT! RESURRECT!”

“YOUR—er—her—what!” After all, Brodeur found he couldn’t say it.

In fact, he didn’t seem able to say anything coherent in the face of the most amazing statement Farnham had just made. He resumed his chair in a rather careful fashion, almost as though doubting the reality of its support, and sat staring at his guest.

And as Eric appeared to sink down in the grip of the suggested situation, Farnham brightened to a visible degree and hitched himself into an upright position on the edge of his seat.

“Her husband,” he said again. “Her first husband, that is. Jolts you, don’t it? It did me, too.” All at once he grinned. “He went to sea over eight years ago and was never heard of since. Ship foundered. Everybody considered him dead. But—you look enough like him to be his brother, and when I saw you to-night, I began to have visions of an *Enoch Arden* episode, and I followed you up here.”

So that was it. Brodeur began to grasp the situation. That was what Farnham had meant by saying he looked like a man who was dead, and one he had never seen. And he could sympathize in a measure with the man’s mental turmoil now as he pictured in his imagination what the situation might have involved, had his fears proved true. He smiled.

“I suppose you’ve seen pictures of him, and that’s how you came to think I resembled him to-night,” he remarked.

“Pictures!” Farnham exclaimed. “They are stuck up all over the house. My wife’s got ’em in her bedroom, and her sitting-room, and one of ’em in a big silver frame on her dressing-table, alongside one of mine, the size of a stamp.” Abruptly his face grew somber. “I suppose, though, that’s keeping up the proportion, if you consider his size and mine.” He sighed.

Brodeur nodded. “Her first husband re-

sembled me in body as well as feature, I should judge."

"Oh, yes. Regular Greek-god sort of chap. You can see why your appearance gave me a sort of mental short-arm jab. That's her words, Brodeur—that Greek god stuff, and the rest of it about his hair being like a Viking's. He had a lot of wavy, tan hair like yours. But—it's all right."

"As a matter of fact, I think it is. It happens that I'm nobody's husband," Brodeur said, and as a vision of Titian hair and red-brown eyes and a graceful figure—a vision he had been holding before his mental eyes when Farnham knocked, flashed into his mind, he added a qualification to his statement in the form of the one word: "yet." Also, he said it in a way which suggested that he might have added further something like "worse luck."

Farnham pricked his ears. Once more he turned his eyes about the room in which they sat. "You're selling real estate, aren't you?" he remarked.

"Ostensibly, yes; in reality, not very fast," his host replied. He was young, and not above telling his troubles to an attentive listener. "I came here about three years ago, when it looked like this town was going to boom, but the cracker proved a squib."

"I know—I know." Farnham ducked his head. "I bought some ground down here then, and I've got it yet. Better try something else."

"I've been thinking of that," Brodeur said. "Lately I've been trying to raise some capital. I've a chance to get the local agency for a very good automobile, and open a garage. I believe I could sell motors a lot better than dirt, and—"

"Marry the girl?" Farnham interrupted in a flash.

"Helen!" Brodeur said before he thought. That was the vision's name, and his visitor's words had served to explode the mental centers where it was enshrined. But he had to smile. Farnham was quick, and, his own trouble allayed, he had not failed to apprehend the full meaning of Eric's statement that he was nobody's husband "yet."

And as he smiled, Farnham broke forth in a quick, short, but not unpleasant

laugh. "Helen, of course." He jumped up. "You'll marry her, Brodeur, and live in Olympus on ambrosia and nectar derived from the sale of gasoline and oil, like any Greek god should. When that time comes, try 'Farnina,' the best breakfast food in the land, useful also for puddings and dainty desserts. I make it, you know, so I know all about it. I'm glad to have met you, even if we came together in a queer sort of way, and I acted a bit like an ass. Got to be getting on now, after I apologize for the intrusion, or I'll miss my train. I suppose you thought I was crazy, just at first, but now that you understand, I hope you'll see just about how I felt." He put out his hand.

Brodeur nodded as he rose and took it in his own. "Of course, Mr. Farnham, and with all respect to your wife, I'm glad I am myself. I'd rather be alive than dead any day in the year. As for the rest—don't apologize, please. I'd have felt about as you did, I fancy, and I'm very glad to have met you, especially if you're Farnham, of Farnham's Mills."

"That's me, and you've got the credit, young man, of blowing up an old codger that hasn't been blown up for years." Farnham's lips quirked. "I love my wife, but I'm not in the Greek-god class. Good night."

"Not in the Greek-god class." Jason Farnham turned his own words over as he hurried toward the depot to catch the Great Rapids train. They were the verbal expression of the fly in the amber of his married life.

Some one has described the marriage state as disenchantment, disillusionment and disgust. Farnham's experience had not been exactly that. Far from it, in fact. He was still in love with his wife. But—he frowned as he hurried along, for some time he had been entertaining a doubt as to just how deeply his wife was in love with him. The trouble had started months before, and it had been growing, eating, gnawing into Jason Farnham's soul through all the months since. Worst of all, Jason felt that the cause of the trouble was in himself.

For twenty years, since he was a youth some four years younger than the man who

had so startled him to-night, Jason had been the head of Farnham's mills. It was then his father had died and left his son in sole charge. And Jason had taken hold. A small man with all the handicaps of a physical organization not strong, but endowed with a driving nervous force, he had lived for, worked for, thought of the mills, to the exclusion of nearly everything else. He had made them what they were to-day—a vast industrial enterprise, growing steadily through the years from a small beginning to their present proportions and reputation as the home of Farnina, a product served daily in thousands of homes. And as he had made the mills grow he had made for himself a reputation for far-sighted, clear-minded, shrewd business ability. For all his small stature, his mild, blue eyes, his sparse and mouse-colored hair, Jason Farnham was regarded as a capable man among men. He had won all he had by his individual efforts, and he was rich. Far bigger men had to bow to Jason's wealth.

Things had gone like that until he was well past forty, and in all those years of success Jason, leading a largely mental life, had lost consciousness of the fact that physically he was a small man still.

At forty-three he met his wife. Up to that time no woman had made any great impression on his life. But when first he saw Naomi Landers, a widow of some seven years' standing, it was love at first sight. To him, the black-haired, violet-eyed woman was at once the most beautiful, the most desirable example of a fellow mortal on whom he had ever laid his eyes, and he began a whirlwind sort of courtship which finally ended in his laying both his heart and fortune at her feet. Naomi, who could count but twenty-six summers in her age, despite her seven years of widowhood, having been married at eighteen to a man possessed of exceedingly good looks and not much else, whose physical perfections had appealed to her girlish fancy—had yielded to his suit at last. They had been married and gone away on a protracted honeymoon a year before. Since then Jason had learned that to be madly in love and engrossed in business at one and the same time is exceedingly hard.

Marriage is always a period of mutual adjustment, and the adjustment is apt to be more jarring if one of the partners to the union is a woman, young and fond of athletic enjoyments, and the other a middle-aged man.

It was during the course of the honeymoon itself that the adjustment brought it forcibly into Jason's mind that he was not of the Greek-god type. He wasn't, and he knew it, but had long ceased to consider the fact as worthy of consideration against his ability in the business world. Naomi, as is apt to be the case with youth, rather failed to exhibit tact. The itinerary of the wedding journey included a stop at a somewhat famous beach, possessing a boardwalk. On the first occasion when the lithe, dark beauty and Jason essayed the water, his physical imperfections were glaringly self-evident. And—when he displayed a tendency to paddle around in the water half-way up his thighs, while Naomi taunted him to dare the surf, until she elicited the information that he really couldn't swim, had never learned how, and was too old to learn, she had made the first remark which set a barb of doubt in Jason's heart.

"You can't swim!" she had cried, standing like a risen Aphrodite before him in her water-soaked, silken suit. "Oh, for goodness sake! Poor dear Jeffery could swim like a fish."

And Jason, feeling the sting of her rebuke more than he cared to show, had showed it none the less in his retort. "Then why in time didn't he swim ashore from that ship?"

"Jason!" she had cried, in a voice of shocked reproach, and turning away had swam off, leaving him to warm his chilled, thin shins on the sand.

To-night he reviewed all this as people will review things in the time following a period of mental stress, while he waited for and climbed aboard his train.

And once aboard it, like the train which carried him toward Great Rapids and Naomi, his thoughts ran on.

In other things, thanks to his undersized body, he had fallen short of the Jeffery Landers standard established by his wife. He had found that rowing a boat in a very awkward fashion caused him to develop

much perspiration, little progress, and a gasping breath. He had learned as a result that Jeffery had been a member of the crew at college, and could pull a wonderful stroke.

When he donned a flannel outfit and essayed tennis at his wife's request, and managed to put most of his service into the net, he was faced with an offer to show him the collection of medals Jeffery had won on the courts.

"What are they worth?" he had asked in a somewhat callous fashion.

Naomi had looked hurt. "Poor Jeffery didn't have a very good business head, of course," she said. "But he left me seven thousand dollars insurance."

"And you mourned him seven years," Jason retorted throwing down his racquet with a sudden distaste for his own futile lack of strength, such as he had not experienced in a long, long time.

Such scenes as these occurred, however, only at the first. Farnham soon learned to listen to the list of Jeffery's accomplishments in silence rather than to bandy words. He did not even protest when, after their return home, Naomi unearthed a number of her former husband's pictures—photographs showing him in various poses and costumes of a varied sort, and proceeded to place them conspicuously about her individual suite of rooms. What he may or may not have felt he kept completely to himself, until in the end, as any one who understands could have predicted, his very lack of protest played the deuce with Jason himself.

For a further exposition of the matter of suppressed emotions, see Dr. Freud. He is an authority on such things and has effected cures of the conditions resulting from such a state. But Jason knew nothing of Freud or his theory. All he knew was that he apparently fell far short of the masculine attainments it seemed his wife most desired, and the knowledge preyed on his mind. It was like an aching wound, an open, though concealed sore. Pain long continued, be it mental or physical, produces certain effects. It bred uncertainty in Jason Farnham's brain.

Uncertainty, over even a trivial matter,

becomes a nagging thing. When it arises between the sexes, and especially between a man and his wife, it is apt to hold the germs of tragedy in its embrace.

Jason loved his wife. On their marriage he had been convinced that the full measure of his affection was returned. He had gone to the hymenal altar in a sort of sublimated glory, compounded of all the unexpressed capacity for love of over forty years. He had felt that this was the climaxing period of his life. His bride had been to him a wonderful thing—more precious than rubies—whom he believed he had won for himself. In his exaltation he had forgotten that he was small, physically weak, not even handsome. His awakening from that mental attitude, his sudden realization for the first time since he was a far younger man, that his was anything but a desirable physique, had been catastrophic in its nature, had as it were cut the ground of self-respect from beneath his feet. By degrees, as Naomi continued to talk of her former husband, heaping encomiums of praise on his tawny, drowned head; as she unpacked and set up pictures, portraying his classic proportions in the shrine of her private rooms, Jason reached a point where he asked himself with a carking reiteration, just how much Naomi might think of himself—just why she had married him indeed, when he was—what he was.

That he never asked Naomi the same question shows both the quality of the man's control and the depths of his own love. He forebore to insult the woman of his choice, by even hinting that she had married a man, who, unlike Landers, was capable of giving her the luxury of wealth. Yet he had been more than human, more of a mental superman, than Landers had been above the average in his masculine beauty and strength, had the thought failed to recur to him at times. One may think a great deal he does not say, and keep it to himself, wherein the theory of repressed emotions once more comes into operation in full force.

Yet Jason did not doubt his wife in any vulgar sense. He did not even wholly doubt her love. His condition was that of a living question. He wanted to know—

and there seemed no earthly way of finding out. He wanted to be assured that Naomi really cared for him more than she cared for the man whose pictures adorned her rooms—those pictures at which, when he could do so undetected, Jason scowled—those pictures which made him realize all his own puny proportions—his bodily deficiencies until at times he fancied that after all he was asking altogether too much to hope that Naomi cared for him, as he wanted her to care—or could care, even if she tried. And yet he wanted to know whether she did or not. He wanted to be sure—to know the best or the worst.

Consequently, while he continued his endeavors to please the beauty who was his wife, he came by degrees to a position where he began to feel something like a hatred of himself—to despise his body as the unfit tenement for a man—to wonder vaguely how Naomi herself had ever been able to bring herself to marry any one like him. There were times when he glowered at his own reflection in the glass. In fact, Jason was rapidly getting into the mental condition best described, perhaps, by the one word "crushed." He who had built up a great industrial institution, had amassed a fortune, who had made his power felt among other men, was being brought to a point, by a black-haired, blue-eyed woman, where his confidence staggered at times. A dozen times a day Naomi's face or that of Landers—the mental image of one of those pictures of the man, crept between him and some detail of business and had to be brushed aside. The dream fabric of marriage which he had erected at first, had become a sorry ruin, despoiled of the trappings of romance.

Nor was it because Jason hadn't tried. He even tried to swim, with the result that Naomi herself had dragged him back into shallow water, gasping like a fish, with the assertion that "one husband" was enough to lose in a watery grave. He had learned to dance, and kept at it until he realized that his capers only accentuated his lack of physical grace. He had learned to row a boat after a fashion, and play tennis of a sort. He had even learned to adopt a new mode in clothes. One thing he had

learned to do very well. That was playing bridge. But—as he told himself he played bridge not with his body but with his brain.

"Morbid," sums up Jason Farnham. He was morbid on the subject of Jeffery Landers and his wife's attitude.

He was jealous of a dead man.

Consequently his first sight of Eric Brodeur had proved an almost numbing shock. He had thought for a brain-whirling interval of recognition that he was looking at Landers in the flesh—Landers grown a trifle older as one would expect, but Landers none the less. Stories of men lost for years, victims of injuries or mental aberrations which had robbed them of their original identity and sent them down the years as some one else, had eddied through his mind in a sickening, unnerving flood. For an instant his intellect had staggered, and then had come reaction and a determination to find out, to learn the truth.

There had been times when Jason had asked himself if Naomi would not really resurrect her handsome husband if she could. Naomi was responsible for the nomenclature associated in Farnham's mind with Landers. "He was like a Greek god," she had said in describing the man. "I used to call him Apollo. And his hair was tawny, and thick like the hair of a Viking. I used to run my fingers through it." And she had never run her fingers through Jason's hair in her life. There wasn't enough of it for that.

Of course Jason had never considered the possibility of resurrecting Jeffery until he saw Brodeur in the café, and then for a blinding second he thought the thing was done. He had been more startled than Pygmalion may be supposed to have felt when his Galatea came to life, because naturally Jason hadn't been praying for any such thing.

Thus far, as the train carried him toward home, Farnham had come back along the trail of the past year in his thoughts. He sat hunched down in the seat while the darkened countryside fled past and the wheels drummed in his ears. By degrees they fitted their rhythm to his thoughts.

"Greek god—resurrect—resurrect—Greek god—Greek god—Greek god—resur-

rect!" they rattled and sang and pounded out beneath the swaying coach in which he sat.

And all at once Jason Farnham sat erect. His china-blue eyes flew wide open and narrowed swiftly, in a breath. A strange look came across his face—an expression of shrewdness, of surprising cunning.

"*Resurrect — resurrect — Greek god — resurrect.*"

A whiff of smoke poured into the door of the coach as a trainman came in and passed along the aisle. But Jason did not notice. He was sitting up in his seat, tensely erect, still with that odd expression. His head was turned a trifle to one side, like that of a dog which cocks its ears. One would have said he was listening to the voice of the pounding wheels.

"*Resurrect!*"

He had thought Eric Brodeur was Jeffery Landers in the flesh. The man had fooled him—him, who saw Jeffery's pictured face in a dozen angles every day of his life. He had sent the blood recoiling in a choking wave upon Jason's laboring heart—had sent him to the Palace Hotel to face the situation squarely if it had to be faced. He looked enough like Landers to be the man's own brother if not Landers himself. He wasn't Landers, of course—had resented the imputation that he could be any one save Eric Brodeur, a purveyor of Dalton real estate, in love with another woman, and seeking the means of making a change in business which would enable him to wed. But—a most amazing thought had come into Farnham's brain.

"*Resurrect!*" sang the clanking wheels. "*Resurrect! Resurrect! Resurrect!*"

A slow smile, a smile of infinite craft, creased Jason's lips. He lay back in his seat. "I'll do it. By all the gods of Greece, I'll do it!" he said.

CHAPTER III.

MATE OR MISTRESS?

AND having sworn his somewhat Delphic oath—as cryptic as any utterance of Delphi's oracle, because whatever it might be he intended doing,

the germ of the whole affair still lay buried within his brain, Farnham lay back again in his seat until Great Rapids was reached.

But as the miles spun away beneath him one would have said he planned. The shrewd look still lingered on his face. Once he grimaced oddly, and once he grinned. Once he nodded his head, and once as though to emphasize a mental point, he lifted a bony hand, and struck the arm of the seat.

Great Rapids, unlike Dalton, is a town of importance and size, the junction point of several railways, with a population to be written in six figures, a modern city in every sense that word implies. In addition it is the home of the Farnham Mills.

Their owner roused as the train bore him into the Union Station exactly on schedule time. He descended into the glare of the sizzling overhead arcs and crossed to the barriers at once. Walking with a quick and purposeful step, he made his way directly through the station, emerged on the street side, and cast his eyes in expectant fashion from left to right.

Almost at once a powerful motor slid smoothly into position beside the curb. The man at the wheel lifted a gauntleted hand to his visor, sprang down and held open the door.

Farnham returned the salute with a nod and entered the car. He sat down, seemingly engulfed in the roomy seat. "Simpson, is the Public Library open at this time of night?" he inquired.

"I think so, Mr. Farnham." The chauffeur had resumed his place at the wheel.

"Then drive there at once."

The gears slipped noiselessly into first speed engagement and the car moved off. Farnham leaned back on the heavy cushions and lighted a cigar. His brows furrowed into a slight frown of consideration as the machine threaded the evening traffic, under Simpson's skilful guidance. Once more his expression became that of a man who plans in a quick and yet careful way. That might have been expected by one who knew the man himself. Jason Farnham was thorough in what he did. It was in such fashion he had built up Farnham's Mills.

Presently the car left the main thoroughfare, swung into a side street, turned in a long, gliding sweep and came to a stand before the glass doors of a somewhat imposing structure from which streamed light.

Farnham hopped down, crossed the sidewalk, and mounted some steps, shoved the glass doors before him in a snappy fashion, and entered a large room where numerous individuals sat with their noses buried in papers or current magazines of the day.

He marched straight across it toward a vista of metal shelves at the rear, and a desk where a young woman sat.

"Good evening. Have you—er—anything on the subject of mental aberrations?" he asked.

The attendant lifted her eyes with something like a start, then, recognizing the man before her, smiled. "On just what form of aberrations, Mr. Farnham, please?"

"Aphasia—I think."

"I'll see." The girl left her seat and disappeared between the rows of metal shelves.

Jason waited, leaning against the desk. Once more his expression became that of introspection. His lips moved. "Aphasia," he repeated softly. "Yes—I think aphasia would be it."

The attendant came back with a book in her arms and laid it on the desk. "Do you wish to take it with you, Mr. Farnham, or will you consult it here?"

Jason turned his glance from the heavy volume to the dozens of readers scattered about the place. He put out a hand and took up the book. "Why," he decided, "I think I'll consult it here."

He carried the volume to an empty seat and laid it on his knee. It was a sort of medical encyclopedia he found. He began at the A's and leafed them quickly, "Ap—aph—apha—" he kept track of the sequence of subjects in an almost soundless way. "Aphasia. Here we are!" He bent his blue eyes a trifle closer in order to read the finer print:

APHASIA—A term used to indicate any disturbance or perversion of intellectual expression. It includes all defects of intellectual expression, whether such disorders be the result of disarrangement or destruction of the receptive or of the

emissive component parts of the speech mechanism, or of anything which may be employed as a substitute or equivalent of speech.

Jason frowned a bit at that. It didn't seem to be exactly what he wanted. One would have said from his manner that it didn't fit into something else he had in mind—possibly that something he had vowed he would do, back there on the train. He raised his eyes and turned his glistening lenses about the room. Presently, though, he brought them back to the page and continued to read:

Thus a person, who despite the integrity of the peripheral speech mechanism is unable to utter his own name; who does not even recognize, although he hears, sounds of the most familiar nature, such as his own name.

And now one would have said the man with the china-blue eyes had found the thing he sought. He threw up his head and closed the book with a bang. He pressed his thin lips together with almost a smack of satisfaction. He rose and took the volume back to the desk, thanked the attendant for her service, spun about, and walked straight across the room and out of the door.

"Home, Simpson," he directed crisply, climbing into the car and resuming his former seat. And all at once he smiled. "Aphasia," he repeated with an almost silent chuckle. "Nothing like going to the right authority and making sure of things in advance. Unable to speak his own name or recognize it when he hears it. Yep—aphasia is the word."

Reaching into a pocket he produced a pair of fawn-colored gloves, and drew them upon his hands. He had not worn them since he had left his house that morning, but now he was going home, and Naomi might or might not be down-stairs to meet him when he arrived. He had been trying his best to please Naomi for something over a year, as witness his heroic attempts at swimming and playing tennis and rowing a boat.

Jason sighed.

Home when he reached it proved to be a very handsome edifice on a thoroughfare lined with other handsome houses. The

car turned in at the side of the grounds and stopped beneath a heavy *porte-cochère*.

Jason climbed out, produced a latch-key, and entered a spacious reception-hall, indicative of wealth. Near an arch giving into the main hall from the front entrance, he came upon a servant in impeccable attire, to whom he gave the fawn-colored gloves and his narrow-banded hat.

"Good evening, Mr. Farnham, sir," the functionary said; "you're late, sir, to-night."

Jason eyed him. What passed for a polite interest on the part of a servant always got more or less on his nerves.

"Is your mistress at home this evening, Parks?" he inquired. He might have asked for Mrs. Farnham or his wife, had not Naomi taught him that "your mistress" was the better form, and drilled him till he seldom made a mistake.

And the factotum answered him correctly. "In her rooms, Mr. Farnham, sir, I think."

Naomi certainly knew how things ought to be done, even if she had not been possessed of the wherewithal to see them done, while her Greek god was alive. And Jason let her do them now, though there were times when he grew rather weary of the formal atmosphere about this home of his.

He nodded acceptance of the information Parks had conveyed, crossed the hall and reached the stairs. With the paper he had thrust into his pocket in Druer's Café still showing, he began mounting—a small, unimposing figure on their broad and easy sweep. At the top he paused, settled his coat and collar and tie into shape, and rapped on the polished surface of a door. A feminine voice replied. He opened the door and went in.

On a chaise lounge, drawn close to an electric reading standard, with a magazine in her hand, was a woman of graceful, almost sinuous form. She was clad in a corn-colored peignoir, the folds of which crossed low in front, revealed the creamy texture of her skin on throat and upper bust. Her hair, dusky, rather than jet black—that fine, black hair that looks almost as though one had blown the smoke of a cigarette through its masses, was gathered loosely to-

gether on her head, and one caught a violet glint from between the dark, curved lashes of her eyes.

As for the room, one might have thought this the home of Eric Brodeur himself, rather than that of the little man just closing the door. Brodeur looked down at the little man from the walls. There was the same line of forehead and nose, the heavy eyebrows, the well-set eyes, the angle of lower lip and chin, which were Brodeur's. They looked back at one from a portrait in a heavy frame, from framed and unframed photographs. They surrounded the woman on the chaise lounge on every side. Only they were not portraits of Brodeur. They were pictures of that Jeffery Landers who had gone to sea and died. And yet, somehow, they seemed to dominate the handsomely furnished apartment, and challenge the little man's entrance to the place, his intrusion upon its occupant who had been manifestly enjoying the relaxation of an evening spent in easy comfort, and who now sat up in an almost languid fashion and put her magazine aside.

"Hello, Jay!" she greeted his advent in a low, full voice, that missed indifference by the merest shade. She lifted a slender hand and stifled a tiny yawn, and then like Parks she added a comment: "You're late."

Jason Farnham turned his glance from the woman to the walls. Almost in a whimsical way to-night he felt inclined to nod in salutation to Jeffery Landers's smiling face. And then he brought his eyes back. "Business took longer than I expected," he replied in explanation, advancing toward a chair.

Naomi smiled. "Don't you ever get tired of business?" she inquired.

Once more Jason eyed her in a speculative fashion. In the end he nodded. "Sure I get tired."

She stifled another yawn. "Have you dined?"

"In Dalton, yes." Farnham reached his chair and sat down. This was Naomi, his wife—this brilliant creature on the lounge. He had asked for her, come in to see her, as he always did if she were at home when he returned from any out-of-

town trip. She was the woman who had been holding a large part of his thoughts on the train from Dalton. And yet, now that he was here, he hardly knew why he had come. As so often of late in these rooms of hers hedged round with Landers's pictures, he felt oddly out of place.

For a moment after he was seated it appeared as though Naomi would resume her former position on the lounge, and then suddenly once more she spoke: "Oh, Jason—what is that in your coat?"

"Eh?" Farnham roused with a start. He began an examination of himself at once. He encountered the paper in his pocket and he drew it out with an almost guilty air. Naomi never liked him to carry things in his pockets, but—he had done it for forty years, or nearly. "It's a—er—paper—Dalton *Evening Dispatch*," he said, and spread it out to the width of the page. He remembered now there was an article he had been reading before he saw the man who looked like Landers, because it dealt with a raise in price of those cereals from which Farnina was made.

Naomi Farnham laughed. She sprang up with a lithe, girlish grace and swept toward him. She bent down and kissed the spot where his sparse hair was sparsest. It was a trick she sometimes employed when they were alone.

And, as always, Jason thrilled. Her presence seemed to wrap him in an intangible cloud. The faint hint of a perfume she had always affected swam about him. He glanced up. He met her deep-blue eyes. They were dancing, in harmony with the smiling crimson of her lips. All at once he was tempted to reach out and seize her, drag her down and crush her to him, drink in the fragrance of her perfumed womanhood, forget everything save her and her alone, and that she was his wife, not the widow of Landers, but *his* wife—*his*. Then—over her silk-covered shoulder his glance encountered Landers's smiling visage. on the wall and his swift, instinctive feeling died. He smiled in a somewhat perfunctory fashion and dropped his eyes again to the printed page.

Naomi, after a moment's hesitation, went back to her former place. But now she

seemed more inclined to talk than resume her interrupted reading. "Jay," she began almost at once, "I'm going to give a tennis fête."

"Yes." Farnham kept the paper before his face. There were a couple of well-made tennis-courts in the rear and to one side of the mansion, and he knew quite well what she meant.

"And I'll have a couple of marquees put up where we can serve tea, and tomorrow I'll make out my list. You'll take a day off, won't you, Jay, and help? You can score if you don't want to play."

Farnham nodded. "I suppose so—yes."

"Jay?" Just her abbreviation of his name.

"Well, my dear, what?"

"What is there so interesting in that paper?"

"Business—business, my dear—grain quotations." Jason continued his seeming scrutiny of the page before which in reality Brodeur's or Landers's or some Greek god's face seemed swimming in front of his eyes.

"Business!" Naomi flared. "It's always business with you. Poor dear Jeffery would have been interested in this plan of mine, but you never seem to care for anything of the sort."

It was the last straw. While seeming to read, Jason had been debating in his mind. That kiss had weakened his resolution more than he would have dreamed it could, had shaken his impulse taken on the train. Even the sight of Naomi had shaken it a little. But now—all at once—the camel's back broke. He lowered the paper and looked straight at his wife.

"Poor, dear Jeffery would doubtless have been interested in any sort of sport—in anything *but* business, from what you have told me about him," he rejoined in a somewhat sarcastic tone. "I suppose he would have enjoyed tea served in a striped marquee. It might not be a bad idea to include his name when you make up your lists. Unless I am mistaken I saw the *dear old beggar* on the street the other day."

"You—*what!*" All the rest of his life Jason remembered Naomi's actions, her voice. Her words were a startled gasp.

She drew back as from a physical blow as she spoke. Her eyes widened swiftly until they seemed not violet but black. Her lips parted. Her bosom rose and fell as though her whole body cringed beneath an icy douche. And then she was straining toward him and her skin was getting very, very white, and her two arms were thrust straight down beside her, grasping the cushions of the lounge with her pink-nailed hands. "Jas—on—you—*what?*"

"I saw Landers or his double!" Farnham cast his paper aside. The die was cast. There was no going back. "I've been wondering whether to tell you or not." That was the truth at least; though not exactly in the way the words implied.

"But—but—" Naomi faltered. "You *couldn't*, Jason—he's dead!"

"We've always *thought* so, you mean. But that was because we've never heard anything of him since his ship was lost. Anyway, the man I saw was the living image of these pictures you've stuck up all over the place." Jason turned his glance about the room.

"He—he looked—like them?"

"He did." Farnham rose and crossed to the lounge.

His wife lifted her troubled eyes to his face. "But why," she questioned almost in the manner of a child, "should he have waited all this time to come back? Jason, there must be a mistake."

"Not necessarily, I'm afraid, my dear." Farnham shook his head. He had expected her to be quite a bit excited and most palpably she was.

"What do you mean?" she exclaimed.

Jason sat down beside her. "Aphasia," he said.

"Aphasia?" Naomi hardly seemed to understand.

"Yes. I think possibly he may have hurt his head; that very possibly he doesn't know exactly who he is; that it is because of that we've never heard anything about him."

"You mean that he doesn't know he is Jeffery?" There was something like awe in Naomi's voice.

"Why, yes," said Jason slowly. "How else can we explain his course?"

For a time nothing more was said. Naomi sat silent and tense, staring straight before her, until at last her eyes began a circuit of the pictures on the wall. Watching her, Jason saw her body begin a queer, rapid panting such as he had never witnessed in a human being before. Abruptly she turned toward him with a question: "Where is he now?"

"Why, er—" he stammered, scarcely prepared for the suddenness of her attack; "I'm hardly in a position to answer that, my dear. Seeing him, you know, was—er—a good deal of a surprise."

"And you let him go? You let him go back into the unknown without finding out—without trying to follow—to learn the truth?" Naomi gave him a glance of surprised reproach.

"I might have followed him, I suppose," he confessed. "But the—situation was rather delicate. It's hardly the thing, you know, to rush up to a man and ask him if he's the husband of your wife; and he'd have denied it, of course, if he's forgotten who he is. Anyway, why should we—"

"Why?" Naomi was on her feet in a flash. "You can sit there and ask me that—you can ask me why I should want to know whether my—whether Jeffery is alive or not? Can't you understand what his being alive would mean to us—to me? Everybody thought of him as dead—even the company in which he was insured. And then you come and tell me you have seen him—that he's alive. Oh!" She lifted her hands and struck them against her breast. "Oh!—can't you see?"

"Of course, of course," said Jason in a rather judicial tone. "The position is somewhat awkward, of course. There was no reason to look for anything like this. Naturally if there had been, I should have had your marriage annulled before making you my wife."

"An—nulled!" Naomi gasped.

"Why, yes," Jason nodded. "Won't you sit down, my dear? You'll tire yourself standing there like that."

"No!" All at once Naomi stamped her satin-slippered foot. "Not until you tell me what you mean by having my marriage annulled—not till you tell me the truth."

It wasn't done. I never thought anything about it. I just considered myself his widow, with a perfect right to marry some one else."

"Certainly you never thought anything about it, my dear," Farnham agreed. "And neither did I. People never do in actual life. At the same time, as a matter of law, while conditions such as—er—Landers's disappearance, raise a warrantable presumption of death, any legal presumption, however well founded and of no matter how vital a nature, is negative by a fact. Consequently I suppose it is as well that we—er—never had a child. Because under the law, I'm afraid that our association might be held illegal, and if there *had* been a little one—why, of course—"

"Stop!" Naomi sank back limply on the lounge. All resistance seemed to go out of her bearing. The last vestige of color drained from her face, producing a deathly pallor. "You mean—that I am not—your wife?"

It was the question direct, and before it Jason Farnham appeared to hesitate. The situation he felt was growing a bit more serious than he had meant it should. Yet he could scarcely avoid the issue he himself had brought about. "That—would—er—depend on whether Landers is alive or not," he said at last.

Naomi caught a quick, unsteady breath, and set her lips. She appeared to maintain her control by a supreme effort. "Then there is only one thing for us to do," she said quickly; "and that is—find out. You must find him, Jason—and learn the truth. Because—if he *is* Jeffery—if you're right—it would seem that I have a husband I've known nothing about for years. And—Jason—you must find him—find him—find out—at once!"

Her voice rose into a very frenzy of entreaty. She broke sharply off with a quivering mouth. And suddenly she turned from him to throw herself face down upon the lounge and burst into a storm of hysterical sobs.

Jason rose. For a long moment he stood looking down upon her shaking shoulders, at a loss, as so many men are, when a woman weeps. He half put out a hand to

touch her and drew it back. A frown contracted his brows. After all, he considered, he loved Naomi, and he hadn't meant to make her suffer like this. And that being the case, the only thing to do was to reassure her.

"I'll find him—I'll find out, my dear, of course," he spoke through the sound of her sobbing, and turned toward the door.

CHAPTER IV.

A GOD DETHRONED.

NOT until the door closed did the woman move, lifting her body on her arms, to regain an upright posture on the lounge.

She put up a hand, curled into a small, pink fist, and pressed it to her mouth. Her eyes, hot and dry for all the sobs that had escaped her, stared at the door through which he had passed. He was gone—gone—and she was alone. And the door stood there, as blank, as unresponsive as the future—that future she had thought so assured an hour ago—which now, like the door, her vision found it could not penetrate.

From it her glance turned slowly to the chair where Jason had sat, to the paper lying spread out beside it on the floor. She rose slowly, in a fashion not altogether steady, bent and picked it up, folded it carefully in the lines of its several creases, sank down in the chair, and sat there holding the paper in her hand.

The odd thought came to her that those printed pages were a symbol of the man. "Business," he had said when she asked him what item held his interest to-night. Jason was a business man. It was business—his ability for business that had given her all she had to-day in her life; comfort, luxury, the caressing softness of crape and silk which kissed her own satin skin. All at once her burning eyes grew moist. She lifted the paper and crushed it in a swift, instinctive motion to her breast. Jason had been very good to her the last year. She asked herself as she sat there if she had ever appreciated his goodness as she ought; if she had not accepted it rather

as her due—a tribute to her beauty, as something won by herself, rather than given to her—to her who, if Landers really were living—was not even Jason's wife.

Yes, Jason had been good to her. He had been good to-night. He had not reproached her for what it seemed might have happened. He had not criticised. He had said merely that they should have had her former marriage annulled. And he had left her just now with a promise to do what he could to learn the truth about their position. All at once a tremor shook her, and she hugged the paper closer still. She found herself wondering how Jeffery, the handsome lover of her youth, would have met a similar condition. And she found the answer ready in her brain. He had always been acutely jealous from the first. His words at times had been an insult to her as his wife. Jeffery would have ranted, threatened, raved. A little wrinkle grew on her smooth, white brow. It began to look to her as though her husband—the man she had thought her husband—the man whose wife she had thought herself for something more than a year, was pretty much of a man after all, despite his lack of either beauty or size. Why—she caught a little shuddering breath—he had even thought it over before he told her—settled it with himself before he spoke. Jeffery wouldn't have done that had she been his wife.

Had been? Naomi gasped. Why, if Jason were right, she was *still* Jeffery Landers's wife. Once more her color ebbed. The thought appalled. She lifted her eyes to a picture of the man himself. It smiled back upon her from the wall. Only now there was something in that smile she had never felt before. Almost it seemed to taunt her, to proclaim in an odd, silent fashion: "You thought I was dead—but I'm not. I'm alive. I'm alive, and you are my wife—not Farnham's, but mine—just as much as you ever were in your life. The last year doesn't matter. It doesn't matter what you thought. The fact that I am alive is all that counts. Jason knows it. He said as much even if in somewhat different words before he left this room. You are my wife. You never have been his."

2 A-S

All at once Naomi found that she wanted to scream—to lift her voice and cry aloud a protest against the words, his smile seemed to wake in her brain—to give vent in that instinctive fashion to a terrible, numbing terror which had been bearing at her soul—ever since Jason had said a presumption, no matter how well founded, was negated by a fact.

The thing demanded some sort of immediate action. And since she might not cry out against it she rose. Still clutching Jason's paper in her hand she began to pace the floor. "Why—why—why," she asked herself, "should Landers come back?" Why should a stigma, a stain, be cast upon her womanhood after all these years of his silence and neglect? Aphasia, Jason had said, and it might explain. If the man had forgotten his past life—who he was, he could not be blamed for his course. But—she paused and stood regarding his portrait wide-eyed and staring. Her bust swelled sharply under its veil of silk. *If* he had forgotten—if he didn't know—what difference did it make? *If* he didn't know who he was, how could he claim her as his wife?

She caught her breath. Swift color dyed her cheek. She blushed. Merciful God, what was she thinking? She clenched her hands and bit her lips. She must be mad to have thought a thing like that. Of course things couldn't go on as they were if she were Landers's wife.

Landers's wife! The thought recurred insistently. She threw herself down again in her chair. Landers's wife! Very much like Jason on the train, she reviewed a part of her life. The man had appealed to her budding sense of romance, excited a sense of physical admiration in her inexperienced mind. But—he had never won her respect. After he had gone away and supposedly died, she had had time to realize that he had never compassed that greatest of all elements in a genuine love—because he had been selfish always, exacting, and like most men of a major physical strength, more or less brutal at times.

To-night she faced the first great tragedy of her life.

Jeffery's death had not amounted to that

for the simple reason that by the time it occurred, thanks to Jeffery himself, the first glamour of her fancy had worn off. She had not voiced the thing, of course. She had been even a trifle ashamed to admit it to herself. But the fact remained, and she knew that after the first startled shock of his loss, she had felt almost a sensation of relief. After that had come her seven widowed years, wherein Jeffery being no more than a memory, had gradually gained a fresh enchantment through a sort of mental perspective.

But now that he seemed likely to become not a memory so much as a living threat against all which had since come into her life, she found she could recall a thousand things beyond his good looks and strength—things more to the credit of Jason.

Rising once more she began a circuit of the rooms, pausing now and then to pick up some trifle expressive of Jason's thought. When they had married Landers had been possessed of but slender means. Afterward he had never seemed possessed of the ability to make his capital grow. Even in the use of what he had, he had first considered himself. He never would, never could, have given her anything like this beautiful room in which she now faced the crisis of his reentrance into her life. The rather bizarre thought came to her, that Jeffery was as inconsiderate in his coming back as he had been before in nearly everything else. And Jason—

If she had failed to appreciate or realize his constant consideration before, she did so now with something like a self-accusing shock. Jason had shown his love by acts, not words. And how had she repaid?

She shivered and drew her robe more closely about her. She had repaid by taking what he gave as a matter of course. Perhaps that was because he was always a little timid in his giving—as though her acceptance were payment and honor enough. But she recalled now a certain vague hunger at times in his face—a hunger she had thought in a somewhat amused way was just his desire to please. To-night she was not sure it had not been a hunger of appreciation, she had seen back of the shell-

rimmed lenses, in his eyes. Her lips curled. She had not even repaid with understanding—she had repaid by using as the main mural decorations of her rooms, the pictured face of the man who it seemed had now come back.

Come back! She caught sight of another of his pictures—a handsome thing in a frame for which Jason's money had paid. And she scowled—actually scowled at its masculine grace, so unlike Farnham's type.

As a matter of fact in this cataclysmic period of her life, Naomi was beginning to veer to another mental tack. From retrospection she had passed to a stage of self-accusation, and was now rapidly approaching a condition of sharply rebellious rage.

Wheeling, she left the room wherein she had thus far battled with the chaos of her thoughts and gained her bedroom beyond a curtained arch. Her dressing-table stood there, its top supporting yet another portrait of Jeffery Landers in a heavy silver frame—the one that Jason had mentioned to Eric Brodeur some hours before. It sat there in the place of honor, surrounded by the costly trifles of the toilet Jason had bought for her, bits of silver and ivory and gold, a glittering array—that and a little oval picture of the man who gave them, with his glasses, his firm chin, his sparse cranial covering of hair. She went toward it and stood with the fingers of one hand touching the edge of the polished wood. She stood looking down at the litter of trinkets it held. She lifted her eyes and stared back at her own reflection in the glass. She dropped them and eyed the picture in the massive silver frame.

And suddenly her rage flared out against it as the object on which it best might be expressed—as the reason, the cause for all her pain, her terror, her horror, her suffering and unrest—for the wreck of her life—her fear of a personal disgrace—for the whirling vortex of the whole dreadful situation in which she found herself caught up, spun hither and thither like a bit of flotsam on the tide of life, until now, at last, she was dizzy and her overwrought brain went round and round in sickening eddies of thought.

"You!" she cried out, seizing it with a

swift, impulsive gesture holding it up, glaring with half-parted lips at the well-formed, self-satisfied face. "You! You've come back—now? Why didn't I have that marriage annulled? Why didn't I have it annulled? Why didn't I feel—know—that some day you were—coming—back? I was a fool—a fool, and I hate you—hate you!" All at once she lifted the frame above her head and hurled it to the floor.

The glass shattered. In a splintering shower it scattered across the hardwood of the floor, the thick pile of a handsome rug. Above it the woman stood, leaning slightly forward, breathing fast and deeply with a quick rise and fall of her chest. After a time she put forth a foot and stamped on the back of the frame, completing the ruin her former action had begun.

Then, still with the paper Jason had read, clutched fast, a crumpled roll in her hand, she turned and threw herself upon her bed. She laid her cheek on the printed page his hands had held. "Jason," she whispered softly—"oh, Jason—d-e-a-r!"

•Could Farnham have seen her then all his doubts as to whether she would wish Landers resurrected or not, might well have been disabused.

But he wasn't there and he couldn't see, and, of course, he couldn't know. He was gone and the door was closed between him and the woman on the bed. So much a door or a couple of doors may shut in or out. Wherefore, while Naomi battled with the sick waves of horror and rebellion which engulfed her; beat upon and buffeted her soul to a state of desperation, Jason was feeling a sense of something like satisfaction, shut up inside his room.

Of course that satisfaction was tintured to a degree with sympathy for Naomi herself; but on the whole he felt that things were going pretty well; very much indeed as he had been inclined to expect. He loved her, and it was not pleasant to feel he had made her suffer or disturbed her in the least. He had even weakened a bit when she kissed him. Her kiss had made him falter in the determination he had arrived at on the train, until her following words had hardened his purpose again, and brought back all the months in which sim-

ilar words had been spoken, had made him realize that now was as good a time as any to settle the point of her actual attitude toward himself, reminded him that now, as never before, he had a weapon ready to his hand. After that he had taken the first step, rather sooner than he had intended, somewhat on impulse, but at a time when it could hardly fail of effect. He was thinking of just what that effect had been, as he slowly disrobed for the night; weighing it, testing its values as he had weighed his whole plan on the train.

Then he had expected Naomi to be more or less upset by his announcement, that Landers might be alive. In his own words he had expected her to "throw a fit." And—he smiled a rather uncertain smile—recalling her actions—she had done exactly that. His judgment in so much had been right. He had counted upon it, wanted her to do it, had played his part to bring about a state of excitement and anxious curiosity in her brain. It was in his calculations that by just such a shock could she best be jolted into a realization of Jeffery as Jeffery had been, and himself as he really was; of just what Jeffery's return must mean. And that was what he wanted her to fully realize. He wanted her to take up a serious comparison of the two men who had made each a part of her life, and decide between them for all time. He judged it would not be a very bad thing for Naomi, who was always raving over Jeffery's numerous accomplishments, to regard herself again for a time, at least, as Jeffery's possible wife.

Of that he judged also Naomi would want proof. And that was where Eric Brodeur would come in. Consequently her frantic appeal that he should find the man had been no more than the working out of his suddenly conceived plan. He nodded. So far then all right.

In fact the only thing about the whole affair thus far, which troubled Jason at all, was a sort of cringing, nagging sense of shame.

The results of his almost instinctive flash back at Naomi's words concerning Jeffery, in so far as his plan was concerned, had been as satisfactory as one could wish. The trouble was they gave Jason, in a personal

sense, no satisfaction at all. She was, after all, the only woman he had ever loved, and her face had grown too white, her eyes too full of an almost nameless horror—a terror he could not exactly understand, not to awake within him a qualm of conscience, that it was through him her state was brought about.

It was considerations such as this that set a slight frown between his china-blue eyes as he buttoned his pajama jacket.

In considering Jason, we must return to the subject of suppressed emotions in order to understand his exact mental state. The victim of repression is apt to exaggerate his position and minimize it at one and the same time. Such a statement must, like many truths, appear a paradox on its face. In reality it is a psychological fact—no more than a manifestation that hope *does* spring eternal in the human breast. Grown morbid on the subject of Jeffery Landers, Jason Farnham was not as yet without hope.

Realizing to the full his physical shortcomings, having had them hammered into his perceptions for a year by Naomi's continual reference to her deceased mate's physique; having demonstrated them indeed in those attempts he had made to emulate the former Greek god in some degree, however deficient it might be; admitting that he could not possibly equal Jeffery's abilities in athletic lines; confessing that he was actually homely, as compared to the Landers standard of man; suffering, as he had suffered in silence, from a doubt of Naomi's genuine feeling for himself, because of these very things, still—Jason had never completely ceased to cherish a sort of dogged, even if at times almost subconscious faith, that she *did* really love him, after all. He wanted to believe it, and he did. Julius Cæsar once remarked that believing what we wished to be true was a human trait, and Jason was no exception to the rule. From the time his mother died until he met Naomi there had been little love in his life. Yet he was human, and he craved affection, perhaps almost without knowing that he did so, as the average human does. Then Naomi, with all her beauty and youth came into

his life to alter that. He loved and he wanted to be loved in return. And no matter how many barbs, other than those of Cupid, might be shot against him; no matter how many verbal thorns the rose he had gathered for his own might hold to wound him, he had never, even when smarting from the pain induced, reached a point where he was ready to admit that she was not altogether his rose.

Indeed had he done so there would have been no reason for his present course, since the question he desired to settle to his own complete conviction would have been decided thereby. And the mere fact that the question continued to nag him from month to month must be held the reason for his entrance upon an attempt to answer it once and for all, when the opportunity seemed to present, just as Brodeur's uncanny resemblance to the departed Landers may be adjudged the cause for the sudden birth of his plan.

The two things seemed to check. His ability to produce a living image of Landers was a thing of which he had never dreamed until Eric suddenly appeared in need of money to carry out his future plans. To Jason it had seemed like Fate. Brodeur looked like a man who was dead. He needed money to marry the woman of his choice. And whatever Farnham might lack in beauty or flesh, he certainly had wealth. Moreover, he was willing to spend it in order to settle his domestic troubles. Indeed Jason, like *Abou-ben Adhem*, dreamed a dream of peace, in which Jeffery Landers's name should be stilled on Naomi's tongue—erased from the tablets of her brain, until, on the page of her affections, like *Abou-ben* again, he himself should lead all the rest. Yes, to Jason the whole thing seemed like a bit of fate. And he had taken the first step. Wherefore he grunted, and lay staring into the dark, while he considered a little further just what other steps to take.

So that, while Naomi whimpered his name, like a tired child calling to a loved one in the night, and Jason continued to scheme out a way to prove that she felt in a way to inspire that very act, Fate or the law of cause and effect, as you will, spun a web of possible tragedy compounded of mis-

understanding, tactlessness, unequal ages, suppressed emotion and other psychological and physical facts over Jason's house.

Because, after a time, Naomi stirred and lifted her face from the paper against which it had been pressed. She held it half raised like one who listens to some faint, far sound, until, with a sudden wrench, she sat up with her feet beneath her, her eyes blank.

Surprise, rebellion, rage. Those things had burned themselves partially out and brought her to something else. Whimpering Jason's name had brought back Jason's words—the thing he had said which had made her cry out in so frantic a fashion for him to stop—what he had said about their marriage, about its being better there was not a child.

She caught a great breath into her lungs and let it out in a sort of shuddering sob. She lifted her hands and pressed them to her breasts, grown a trifle more tender than ever before inside the last few weeks.

Jason had said a child of theirs would not be a legal issue if Landers were still alive—if she still were Landers's wife.

"Illegitimate!" Her lips formed the horrid word in a soundless whisper. She sat staring, staring not at anything objective before her, but into a future horror, engendered by the word.

After a time another spasmodic shudder seized and shook her. She put down her face and covered it with her hands.

"Illegitimate! Oh—God!"

So much a closed door may shut in or out.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

The Great Stroke



by Max Brand

AN epigram has the same relation to truth that a duck pond has to the open sea. Like the ocean the pond reflects the blue sky, and in the same way, I suppose, all epigrams carry a partial truth. No doubt the duck finds his pond a noble stretch of water, and the maker of epigrams is generally inclined to despise all other forms of expression.

Jordan coined epigrams.

Otherwise he was a jovial fellow, but in an argument he was, to be frank, an in-

fernal nuisance. While one explained a theory and puffed it out with nebulous thoughts until it began to float, Jordan sat back with his hands folded, smiling serenely; but at the very critical moment when that inflated balloon of theory was about to leave the earth and soar to the clouds, he popped out with an epigram that pricked the bubble of an hour's fine dreaming, and in place of the noble balloon there remained only some fluttering fragments.

The shadows of a thousand shattered

conversations surrounded Jordan. I've no doubt they were to him what the scalps of dead enemies were to Indians.

Because he was so amiable in many ways I never confided to Jordan my inner opinion of his processes of thought, but finally he passed the forbidden line and the anger which I had been storing up for months, like water behind a dam, I loosed upon him in a single burst.

It was the old argument about the Russian. I had a carefully elaborated theory that the Slav peasants are packed full of energy, but it is the energy of the dreamer and they require a severe jolt before they will awaken and translate their moods into concrete acts. I expounded all this to Jordan at dinner in the club, and he waited until we settled down to a chess game afterward before he fired his epigram, a solid shot that hit me between wind and water. He did this immediately after capturing my queen with an impudent knight, and the combination was too much for my self-restraint.

In a word, I let Jordan have it, and I drove my opinion of him straight from the shoulder. I might have known that he would hear me with unbroken good humor.

As I finished, a little red and puffing, he suggested that we refer the argument to a referee, and when I agreed we hailed Marshal. I secretly think that Marshal inclined toward Jordan's point of view, but he wouldn't commit himself.

"Here's a lot of theory and not much fact," he said, "but a few minutes ago I was introduced to a man who has been in Russia. Suppose we go up to the dining-room and find him?"

We followed him—I was rather glad to discontinue that disastrous chess game—and in the dining-room he led us toward a table at which sat Stewart and the traveler. The latter was a small middle-aged man, and the moment I saw his round, white face, I knew him. It was Jean Paul Meneval. At that time he was quite unknown—which is, in a way, the point of this story. A rare coincidence, that meeting, for it made the third time I had run across Meneval in widely separated quarters of the earth—the first time in Naples, again in

Manila, and now in a fashionable New York club!

He greeted in his usual unsmiling, earnest manner, and as Stewart and he were down to cheese and coffee, the rest of us drew up chairs around the table. Marshal announced the reason of our coming.

"I've been in Russia," said Meneval in that quiet voice of his, "but, of course, you can't expect me to settle an argument on a point so—so very inclusive. It is like prophesying the destiny of the Slav, isn't it?"

"Come," said Jordan, leaning forward in his aggressive way, "we aren't asking for a profound opinion. Put it this way: I claim there's the touch of the brute in the Slav—they have the brute mind, the brute way—they go to extremes; they're either blindly stupid or blindly violent. What do you think? They couldn't become—I mean, the mass of them—men of the world, men of culture, *welt*-citizens. Pardon me for being personal, but I mean they couldn't become men like yourself—a Frenchman perfectly at home in an American club."

"And I hold," I broke in, "that they can—that through their very violence they are apt to strike the spark which will light up what Jordan called their brute nature and they will see their souls."

Meneval looked at me with one of his rare smiles.

"In a way," he said, "I incline to agree with you."

"The devil you do!" cried Jordan. "Not really? Let's have your proofs!"

Jordan, after all, *was* a bit of an ass; but Meneval was looking into profound space while he lighted a cigarette. I noticed his hands. They were very white and slender, but the tips of the fingers were oddly blunt.

"I knew a Russian who became quite a man of the world. In fact he passed muster nearly everywhere," he said.

"Was he originally a man of the people?" demanded Jordan sharply.

"A shoemaker."

"Then he won't do as an example. A shoemaker is a skilled laborer and his work gives him time to think. I refer to the mass of the Slavs—the peasant class."

"When I describe the fellow," said Men-

eval, "I think you'll find his class low enough."

"Fire away."

"Ah, but it's quite a long story."

"All the better," said I. This would be a crusher for Jordan.

"We're a long way from Russia, but I suppose I should omit names," began Meneval, "or better still, change them. We'll call the man—let me see—Rotanoff. Yes, Maxim Rotanoff. That has the Russian tang, hasn't it? He was a shoemaker, as I said. He didn't work in a shop but carried his roll of leather and his case of tools along with him when he went down the streets of the village.

"That village lay in the heart of European Russia. On the whole I suppose it was at least two centuries behind the civilization of western Europe. The village held about four thousand people and the same number of dogs—all starving. If you had been in Russia you would know the place from that description. The nearest railroad was a hundred miles away.

"Nearly every one in the town worked on the estate of the rich noble—let's call him Dmitri Gorgos. In fact the village itself was built on his lands, and every inhabitant paid him a rental which varied according to the amount of money the tenant was making.

"This fellow, Maxim Rotanoff, you may be sure, was no better off than those who tilled the soil. Indeed he was their servant, in a way. He went the rounds of the houses asking for work. Often he met a man on the streets, and if the man had a boot which needed repairing he would take it off and stand wiggling his toes in the mud while Rotanoff crouched beside his little case of tools, cut the leather without much care to make it fit the hole, and cleated it home in a few minutes. Then his customer would wipe the mud from his bare foot with his hand, draw on the boot, and give Rotanoff his fee. Do you find Rotanoff's position low enough?"

Jordan made a wry face. "And this chap became a man of culture. My dear sir, it isn't possible! But wait a moment. Perhaps he was a rare example—a man who hated his place in life and bent every

moment to study and fit himself for other things. Is that it?"

"Not at all," smiled Meneval, and Jordan's face fell. "No. He was quite contented with his lot. Never dreamed of anything else. His pleasures were few, but they were great to him. He was glad when spring came; he was sorry when autumn passed; he revered the village priest; even the mud did not bother him very much. Yes, on the whole I should say that he was happier in his place than I am in mine!"

He smiled again and his eyes wandered off into space. That was a trick of Meneval's. It gave him a sort of plaintive aloofness.

"Now," said I, "now for the great stroke which I lifted him out of the slough!"

"The slough?" said Meneval absently.

"Ah, yes; the great stroke! This Rotanoff was in love with a girl—we'll call her Ila Nadasky. He had no need of the lessons of civilization to love her passionately. She was straight and slender, with dark hair and darker eyes. She had a trick of throwing her head back to take a deep breath. At such an instant she seemed to scorn the earth."

Meneval pushed his hand slowly through his stiff, iron-gray hair. It was so coarse that it seemed to defy the brush and fell quite low over his forehead.

"I suppose she was beautiful. Rotanoff seemed to think so even after the many years. She was fifteen and he was seventeen when he told her he loved her. They decided to marry, but they waited three years while Rotanoff starved himself and saved up a few rubles. Oh, it was very little, I assure you; but if he saved a ruble in a fortnight they were content. He would bring it to her and they laughed and kissed the ruble and each other and sometimes even wept. You see, that is the Russian nature."

"After those three years—they were really terrible years of privation to Rotanoff—the glorious day came. They were mightily thrilled, I suppose, those two peasants! It was a holiday. They had waited for that so that all their friends could follow them to the church. The procession left Ila Nadasky's house. What a day!

What a day it must have been for them! She had flowers twined in her hair and she carried more flowers in her hand. Rotanoff was so proud of her that his neck ached from looking sidewise at her beauty while they walked down the street. And half the village followed them, weaving in and out to avoid the little pools of water which stayed there from the rain of the night before.

"They were half way to the church when two horsemen galloped around a corner and came toward them. They were no other than Dmitri Gorgos and his eternal companion, Paul Maxady. At sight of the train they drew rein very sharply, so that Gorgos's horses slid to a halt with braced feet and sent a little shower of slush sprinkling upon Ila Nadasky. Of course she was too overawed by the nearness of the great man to cry out, but I'll wager that shower of mud on her wedding dress hurt her more than if it had fallen on her bare heart.

"Gorgos leaned from his horse a little and smiled upon her beauty. He was a rather ugly man, but his smile could make his face almost handsome. There again is the Russian for you. He asked her name, but his eyes were fixed so fast upon her face that he did not seem to hear when Maxim Rotanoff answered for her. Then he gave Rotanoff a glance, delved into the pocket of his riding breeches, and tossed the groom a gold coin.

"Of course it was a fortune to them—more than they had saved in the whole three years. They were so dumb with joy that they could not say a word of thanks, but the crowd behind marked the yellow flash of the coin as Dmitri Gorgos tossed it, and how they shouted and cheered their beneficent lord as he galloped off down a side street with his companion!

"Strangely enough when the procession came in sight of the church the noble was outside it in the act of remounting his horse. For some reason he had circled back on his course, for he had been riding in the opposite direction when he first passed them. However, it gave the crowd another opportunity to cheer, and this time you may be sure that Maxim Rotanoff led the shouting. After such happiness—

after such glorious good fortune—sorrow had an added tang, and it followed quickly enough.

"When they reached the church they found the priest gone. He had left word behind—it was very vague—that business, a sudden death on the Gorgos estate, called him away, and that he could not celebrate the wedding until the next day.

"Poor Rotanoff and Ila Nadasky merely stood and stared at each other. The rest of the procession broke into groans. You see, both Ila and the groom were very popular with the peasants and every one had looked ahead for a long time to this wedding.

"Nevertheless the two had the gold coin to balance against the postponement of the marriage. They sat up late that night whispering plans for their future. And everything was given an added color and brightness by the sheen of that yellow metal. All things seemed possible to them. They spoke confidently of great sums of money which they would earn and save. Maxim Rotanoff even mentioned a thousand rubles. At that they both stared at each other in speechless excitement, and they finally broke into laughter together. There again, you see, is the Russian nature."

"And the next morning the girl was gone—that was the great stroke?" broke in Jordan. "That was what changed Rotanoff?"

I could have throttled him, and the suggestion of a frown troubled Meneval's placid forehead.

"The next morning the girl was gone," he said coldly, "but that was not the great stroke. Her mother came running a little after dawn to Rotanoff, telling him that the girl had gone out of the house to borrow salt from a neighbor, and she had not come back and neither had she been to the neighbor's house. Of course you have guessed it already. Two of Dmitri Gorgos's servants carried her away the moment she left her mother's house. That was all.

"It was three days—three heart-broken days—before Rotanoff learned what had happened. Then he walked twenty miles to the neighboring village and spent the

gold coin for a very fine revolver and ammunition."

"With which he returned and shot the dog of a noble dead," broke in Jordan. "It's as plain as day, and I suppose that was the great stroke?"

"Really, sir," said Meneval, raising his eyebrows.

"Keep still, Jordan," I said, and I wanted to wring his neck for his boorishness.

"But let's have the point!" said Jordan, "Damn it all, where does all this lead?"

"Ah," said Meneval, "it is indeed plain that you do not see the manner of a Russian tale! The point will come soon, Mr. Jordan.

"Rotanoff came back to his village and for six months he lived as if nothing had occurred. People sometimes pointed to him and shook their heads in pity. He did not seem to heed. Several times he heard from gossips things which made his soul burn in him. Yet he would not hurry. Whenever he found an opportunity he went far from the village and practised with his revolver until he became amazingly expert. He would not miss that shot.

"When he was satisfied with his skill he began to take walks out to the gardens of Dmitri Gorgos's house. There he lurked about. Finally he met with the opportunity. Gorgos came down a path walking alone. Rotanoff crouched behind a shrub."

"Why didn't he step out and do it like a man?" growled Jordan.

"As Gorgos came beside the shrub," went on Meneval, now ignoring Jordan, "Rotanoff leveled the revolver and pulled the trigger with a practised hand. There was merely a dull click in response. The hammer fell upon a defective shell, that failed to detonate. The noble jumped through the shrub and collared the fellow. He shook him as a dog might shake a rat, so violently that the revolver dropped from his hand and his brain reeled. Gorgos kicked the weapon to a distance. There was no fear in that man.

"Then he dragged Rotanoff up the path. Paul Maxady was smoking a cigarette on the porch. There was music in the house.

"Look at this dog," said Gorgos. 'Mu-

sic tires me, and I went for a stroll through the garden. This puppy tried to shoot me.'

"Maxady leaned a little closer and by the light which came through the open door he looked at Rotanoff.

"Ah," said he, 'this is the man who was to marry Ila.'

"Gorgos tightened his hand on the peasant's collar and turned him about so that he could see his face, and he kept repeating at little intervals: 'So! So! So!'

"Otherwise he said nothing. After a time he started around the side of the house, taking Rotanoff with him. They entered a dark hall and Gorgos made Rotanoff step lightly while they passed through several unlighted rooms. Finally they came to a door a little ajar which opened on a brilliant hall.

"Look in there," said Gorgos.

"Rotanoff peeked carefully. He rubbed his eyes and looked again. It was the first time he had ever seen women and men in evening dress. They sat about drinking brandy from very small glasses, and there were small cups of black coffee. The musicians had just finished a piece. One of the women was more beautiful than the rest. She wore a black gown and she had a great red jewel pendant in the hollow of her throat. It was a long moment before Rotanoff recognized Ila Nadasky. You see, she seemed quite at ease among that brilliant group. He turned away from the door and supported himself with one hand against the wall. He had received the great stroke, as you call it. That was the thing which changed him.

"Do you understand?" said Gorgos.

"I understand," said Rotanoff, and he went back to his home in the village."

Meneval broke off and lighted another cigarette.

"Afterward Rotanoff became quite a polished man of the world. I know, for I was a familiar friend of his," he said, "and you see how low his origin was, but I am sure that if you had known him you would have accepted him as a man of culture."

"But the man—the woman—Rotanoff—Ila!" gasped Jordan. "You won't leave the story at that point?"

Meneval regarded Jordan with quiet dis-

approval. "The point of the story is really there," he said.

"Yes, yes! but the girl—"

"Why, if you wish to know what became of her—"

"I should say so!"

"Then I'll finish the story—for your sake!" and Meneval nodded pointedly at Jordan. "Besides, I should really explain why Rotanoff left Russia.

"Rotanoff went back to the village, as I said, with a feeling that some one had turned a search-light on his insides, if you'll admit that expression."

"A very good one—by all means!" said I, somewhat flattered.

"He suddenly discovered that he wanted to change himself. You see, he loved Ila more than ever. When a man really wants a thing he usually gets it. The richest of the villagers had a son called Misha Detin. He had gone to a college for a year or so and he had a number of books—French and German and English books and dictionaries, among other things. Rotanoff scraped an acquaintance with him and very soon was able to borrow the books.

"He read them at all hours—it was like food to him. Russians are very apt linguists. Rotanoff picked up French first, and then English. In a year he made really amazing progress. He had no exact plans for his future. He merely wanted to learn—to learn everything at a great mouthful. By the second year he was quite advanced. It is astonishing how rapidly an eager man can learn. He began to show his change. The village respected him, but was a little suspicious because he lived so much apart.

"Quite late one night there came a knocking at the door of his hut. He laid aside his book and opened the door. He could not, at first, make out the features of the woman who stood here, so he stepped aside and asked her if she would enter.

"'I have not the right to enter,' she said. Then he knew it was Ila."

Meneval paused again with that rare smile and those eyes which searched the infinite distance.

"The Russians, you know, are quite emotional. Rotanoff dropped to his knees

and buried his face in her dress. He led her into the hut and closed the door and gave her place on the bed, for she looked ill. He could not speak for a time, and the tears ran down his face.

"'Ila,' he said, 'I have not prayed to God, but he has sent you back to me.'

"She smiled at him, and when he knelt beside her she let her hand wander over his face while her eyes looked into the distance. It was as if she tried to see him through the sense of touch.

"'We shall be married to-morrow,' he said.

"'Yes,' she would answer, 'to-morrow.'

"'You have thought of me a little, Ila?'

"'I have always loved you, dear little one,' she would say. You see, Rotanoff was a small man.

"He caught her into his arms and kissed her throat and lips. Afterward he stood back and asked her pardon, and she smiled at him. He took out all the books—they were ragged with his use of them—and he went over them with her. Sometimes it was hard to explain their meaning to her, but she nodded and seemed to understand—in a way. Then he kissed her hands and went away to a friend's hut.

"In the morning when he went back to his place he found her body cold on his bed. She had stabbed herself with one of the sharp, crooked little knives that he used for cutting leather. The wound was in the hollow of her throat where Rotanoff had seen the red jewel shining.

"He sat beside her all that day. In the evening he went up to Gorgos's house with the knife in his pocket and told a servant that he had important news for Dmitri Gorgos. The servant made him wait in a hall, for the master was out riding.

"Very soon he came in carrying his heavy crop. Rotanoff went to him.

"'I have brought you news from the village,' he said.

"Gorgos looked him over. 'Who is this fellow?' he asked the servant.

"'I am the man who was to have married Ila Nadasky,' said Rotanoff.

"'Ah,' said Gorgos.

"'She has killed herself,' went on Rotanoff, 'with this knife.'

"And he showed it to the master.

"'God!' said Gorgos, and struck him over the face with the butt of his riding whip.

"It must have been loaded, for it tore down a V-shaped wound on Rotanoff's forehead and knocked him back against the wall. Gorgos was panting as if he had been running. He tore open his shirt. The blood was streaking down Rotanoff's white face and he grinned in his hopeless way. He must have seemed like a poor child who presses his face against a shop window at Christmas time and yearns for the costly toys inside. What he really saw was not Gorgos but an image of the dead girl as he had seen her when she wore the red jewel;

and there was Gorgos's throat, naked before him. He sprang forward and drove the sharp little crooked knife home.

"The master coughed and dropped to the floor. The red blood welled from the hollow of his throat, and as the light struck it looked like a great ruby. That was why Rotanoff had to leave Russia."

We were all silent. Meneval was staring into the void again. He pushed his hand absentmindedly through his mop of hair. As it moved back I saw a triangular scar on the upper part of his forehead.

"But that doesn't prove the main point," began Jordan in a brutally loud voice, "We were arguing—"

I got up and left the table.



THE RED CROSS NURSE

BY HAROLD SETON

LET others sing of soldier bold,
Let others sing of sailor brave,
Of how the trenches are controll'd,
Of life upon the ocean wave!

I choose instead another theme,
And so I weave this little verse:
Though men are worthy of esteem,
I cry, "All hail the Red Cross nurse!"

She spurns the easy, pleasant task,
And seeks the life of anxious care,
In lazy comfort she could bask,
But she would rather do and dare!

All things concerning war are bad?
Nay, nay, my friend, it might be worse!
These women make the angels glad!
I cry, "All hail the Red Cross nurse!"

No longer let us hear the phrase
"The weaker sex!" 'Tis obsolete!
Oh, turn disparagement to praise!
"The meeker sex!" For that is meet!

Though meek, still mighty, after all!
The proofs I need not here rehearse,
Nor to your mind one case recall!
I cry, "All hail the Red Cross nurse!"

The Substance of by His House Stephen Allen Reynolds

Author of "Mid-Ocean," "Pleasure Island," etc.

Men do not despise a thief, if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry; but if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house.

PROVERBS VI, 30-31.

THERE are bugle-calls which race the blood and rouse the fighting passions of soldier-men, sending them leaping hot into battle. The inarticulate fanfares, which to knowing ears means "Deploy!" "Commence firing!" the soul-raking "Charge!" the clarion "Rally!" set gooselish creeping alike under tunics of olive-drab and khaki, under blouses horizon-blue and field-gray.

And the vocabulary of the copper throat is wide and varied. It summons men to mess, to drill; it bids them sleep. Musically it breathes out the lights in tent and barrack; softly it calls the faithful to fall in for divine worship; harshly and imperatively it brays for reserve supports and fixed bayonets.

Yet of all the calls there is but one which, daily recurrent, resurgent, penetrates to the land o' dreams, and to the transients there whispers sweetly of crimson and gold in the earthly east, of the birth of a new day. Three great armies, one of them as yet a healthy suckling, have in common their "Reveille," and although the British hold fast to their separate air, the call marks alike for them the awakening—the beginning of a day to be ushered out by twilight and "Taps."

What follows concerns neither bayonet-work nor the netting of spies; but has to do with one particular reveille, a private call, as it were, blown by lips invisible and heard by one pair of ears alone. And, by way of further preface, let it be known that those ears were the property of Mr. Edward Beale, a Vermonter, an electrician *par excellence*, and—àhem!—a cracksmán of the very first order..

CHAPTER I.

THE JONES PROTECTIVE COMPANY, INC.

UNTIL the prison gates of Auburn creaked open one sunny October morning and spewed forth "No. 10,506," there were but two living outside of gray stone walls and steel bars who knew the method of "beating" the electric system of the Jones Protective Company, Inc. Old Jones had been shown years be-

fore how to get by his crisscrossed wires and through his tinfoil-lined bank partitions of oak and mahogany veneer without short-circuiting the current, with the resultant jangling of the alarm-bell at district headquarters.

Being the principal owner of the patents, Jones felt safe enough about the secret as far as he himself was concerned. Nor did he worry about the dangerous bit of knowledge locked up in the grizzled head of his

installation foreman. The foreman chewed Natural Leaf, was careless in the matter of itemizing his monthly expense accounts, and never missed his yearly spree; but on the other hand, he had been with the company nearly thirty years, and had an invalid son and a litter of grandchildren to support on his far-from-generous wage. No, Jones told himself year after year, the foreman would go straight. He was dependable in the main—even in the matter of the periodical bouts, which never exceeded a fortnight, and which, thoughtfully and invariably, came during the slack season in late summer, when gilt-edged prospects for electric protection were Hempsteading and Newporting and thinking about Stockbridge and Lenox.

But Edward Beale, the gaunt and taciturn New Englander who had called him "a dollar-hungry old crab," represented the algebraic x of Jones's problem, and that problem consisted of maintaining J. P. C. preferred at 138, or thereabouts. Were it widely known that the Jones protective system had a fault, bankers, jewelers, and furriers would hire extra watchmen and cancel the high-priced service which no longer protected absolutely. And the stock, both preferred and common, would promptly nose-dive and plumb the depths of that Sargasso Sea of finance where lay the bones of countless fliers in gold and oil and rubber and what-not.

So it was that three years, six months and twenty days after a certain painful and costly event in the history of electric protection, President Jones scratched his rheumy scalp, stroked his beak of a nose for some moments, and then picked up his telephone receiver and growled for a number. Soon the switchboard girl at Ahern's Agency got the "flash," and without delay Jones was connected with the day superintendent.

"You remember that feller Beale that was assistant foreman for me—the man that got mixed up in that Twenty-Eighth Street fur robbery?"

"Yeah; he got a five-spot, didn't he?"

"That's the man. Well—figurin' off his commutation for good conduct, he'll be leavin' Auburn a week from next Monday

or Tuesday. I want him watched till further orders—watched *close*. And if he starts to pull anything crooked on any of our service customers I want him pinched before he makes a holy show out of our protection system. Another crack like that fur haul might ruin us. And I mightn't be able to hush up a second break."

"All right; I'll put one of our best men on the case. He'll 'sight-tail' the gimper by day and 'put him to bed' every night. If he prowls around any of your customer's premises we'll grab him before he clips a wire. How'll weekly reports suit you?"

"No. I want 'em daily—'specially for the first fortnight or so. And—hello—tell Ahern I won't stand for any fancy expense trimmin's on the bills."

"Right-o! Beale is the name, and he's due out a week from Monday at the earliest?"

"Uhuh! Edward Beale—B-e-a-l-e. He's six feet two and skinny; talks with a Yankee twang; about thirty-three years old now."

"All right, Mr. Jones. One of our star tailors will make Auburn a week from Sunday. If Beale heads back for town I'll phone you shortly after he hits the Grand Central."

CHAPTER II.

MR. "TAILER."

NEW YORK looked good to the tall young man in the expensive but out-of-date suit, which was wrinkled somewhat and still harbored the scent of moth-balls. For fully three minutes he stood motionless outside the big terminal, watching the hurrying people scurry in and out of the subway entrances and exits. Dusk had fallen, there was a chill in the air, most of the passers-by wore overcoats. The man who for more than three years had borne a number instead of a name had no overcoat, yet he was warm and felt strangely contented. Arc-lights hissed and sputtered into light, one after the other yellow rectangles spotted the purple façade of a hotel across the way, and he who had been No. 10,506, lit a cigarette and strolled

leisurely toward Broadway. Simultaneously a quietly dressed person wearing a black overcoat ceased yawning at a drug-store display and also moved west.

"God, but what a lot of uniforms!" the man in the lead mused as he crossed the asphalt of the avenue.

A British airman overtook and passed him, jauntily twirling a swagger-stick. Spurs clinked along the flagstones in the shadow of the Library Building. A trio of sailors, arm in arm, rolled into Bryant Park and joined a gaping mob which hemmed in a bare-headed young man perched on a folding-stool. The ex-prisoner paused and listened for a few moments, his suit-case at his feet, his hands on the pickets of the iron fence. Black Overcoat crossed the street and stood near the opposite curb, sheltered partly from the view of his quarry by a waiting taxicab.

An "L" train roared past, and in the midst of a more or less specious argument against suffrage for women, the husky-voiced person on the stool broke off. Then the man at the fence picked up his suit-case and strode away; more briskly now, for the inner man was calling for food, and there was a furnished room yet to be found.

The doors of a corner saloon yawned—an establishment where in former days the ex-prisoner had spent many hours and dollars. He lagged, paused and stood uncertain for an instant, then entered the place and was relieved to see an unfamiliar face behind the bar.

There were other changes, too; price-tags propped up beside thin-cut sandwiches on the counter where luncheon of sorts was at one time *gratis*. And over the curly head of the white-jacketed dispenser of drinks a framed notice read:

Bar Whiskies	- - - - -	20 cents
All Case Goods	- - - - -	25 cents

"What 'll it be, sir?" The man in the white jacket smiled and stood waiting.

Edward Beale gulped once or twice. From the high-ball of a customer at his elbow the almost-forgotten odor of Scotch and carbonated water floated up to his nos-

trils and stirred a dormant craving. Quickly decision came. Unconsciously he took his foot from the brass rail and stood erect.

"Gimme a split of Irish ginger-ale," he said, feeling in his pocket for change.

A light victorious gleamed in the blue-gray eyes as he sipped the drink, and when he turned and headed on up Sixth Avenue, Beale stepped with the stride of a man who had apparently no first-hand knowledge of the lock-step. He had met and conquered his first temptation. Future victories should come easier.

Well into the Fifties he walked north, and then, passing into a side street where at the moment pedestrians were rather scarce, he slowed his pace and glanced carelessly behind him. Seemingly no one had followed. A pair of gum-chewing girls overtook him and kept on. A baker's boy with an armful of long French loaves was now the only person between him and the corner he had just turned.

Yet the man fresh from Auburn was far from satisfied. Years of daily association with past-masters in the work of police-dodging and evading "tailers" had taught him that a skilful shadow is more often than not *across* the street from the one followed—in some cases even ahead.

Abreast of Beale, on the other side of the street, a card in a basement window caught his eye. There was a lamp-post near, and as he reached it he halted and drew out a newspaper folded to the "Furnished Room" columns. As if in search of a number, he looked first at the paper and then peered at the lighted transom across the way. Came a grunt of satisfaction. A person wearing a black overcoat sauntered along west, and there was that in his gait and bearing which seemed familiar to Beale.

"Looks a good deal like the guy I saw walking up and down the Auburn Station platform," the ex-prisoner told himself. "And the same one that followed me through the Albany restaurant."

He grinned and pocketed the paper, crossed the street and rang the bell. Ten minutes later, after satisfactory arrangements with a frowzy appearing landlady, who seemingly had eaten onions that day, Beale turned out the gas in his front hall-

room and peeped cautiously through a rent in the dingy window-draping.

"'Pep' Connor was right!" he muttered with emphasis as he saw the man in the black overcoat pass slowly along the far sidewalk.

Now the words of the notorious lifer, who in his day had stolen upward of a million, came back to him as though spoken but the day before: "You've got the reputation o' bein' up here for beatin' the Jones system. I'm not askin' you whether you did or whether you didn't. But take it from me, you skinny devil, if you *can* beat it, and the 'dicks' know it, you'll be tailed for the rest o' your natural life."

For several minutes Beale stuck to his post behind the curtain and was rewarded by seeing the shadower pass once more. Now he was certain that the old bank thief had prophesied truly.

A grim smile spread over his lean features. A laugh, short and gruff, came from his throat rather than from his lips. Then he shook his fist at the form now indistinct in the shadows of an office building up the street.

"I'm going to fool you, Mr. Tailer," he growled; "fool you good and plenty."

And with these words Beale turned from the window and left the house. Not so much as a single glance did he cast behind him as he gained Broadway and entered a lunch-room. His plans for the future were sound and laid with care. They could watch him as close as they pleased.

CHAPTER III.

AN ANONYMOUS LETTER.

TO Jones, worrying over the schedule for the new income tax, came an interruption in the person of Ahern himself. The head of the big detective agency refused the proffered chair and waved away the cigar box. Then he leaned heavily on the edge of the president's desk.

"I've only got a minute," he said, "for I'm due at General Sessions now. I had business on the eleventh floor, and as long as I was passing I thought I'd drop off and tell you what was on my mind."

The detective's eyes sought the open door to the outer office. His voice dropped to a husky whisper as he continued:

"It's about that Beale case."

Jones straightened up in his chair. "You don't mean—"

"I mean you're wastin' money," Ahern broke in, wagging a thick forefinger. "That guy is marchin' a straight line. He's been at that Brooklyn electric plant three weeks now; keeps good hours; doesn't touch a drop. He's got a room pretty close to the White Lights—that's true—but he's steerin' clear o' the alcohol and flaggin' the show-girls he used to pal around with. My advice to you is to call us off. Of course we're makin' money out of it, even if it's only a few bucks a week, and it's my graft to make money for the agency. But we're old business friends—we always recommend your system; you always put in a good word for us—and I'm tellin' you, you might as well throw your coin down a sewer as to have us keep on tailin' this feller."

Ahern, having given his friendly advice, consulted his watch. Rather impatiently he stroked his dyed mustache as he awaited the tip what to do in the matter of Edward Beale.

"What's the word?" he whipped out finally, as the old man continued jabbing holes in the desk-blotter before him. "Shall I call it off?"

"Not by a damned sight!" Jones grated. Fear showed in his pale-blue eyes as he raised them after one last jab with the letter-opener. The venom of hatred bubbled acidly in his tone as he ordered the man-hunter: "You just keep on watching him—and watch him *close*. He's only lying doggo for a bit. I won't feel safe till he's behind the bars again; and I—I'm looking for something of interest to happen very shortly."

"Well, it's *your* funeral," Ahern growled. He shrugged his broad shoulders and swung out of the office, leaving a scowling man behind him.

Shortly Jones stopped scowling. He pawed over the papers on his desk until he found the shadowing reports, glanced at one of the earliest ones, and smiled craftily as he rang for his stenographer.

Beale, a wrench in one hand, a bunch of waste in the other, stood back from the generator he had been nursing and switched on the power. The machine purred into life and ran sweetly. The lank Vermonter's scowl melted into a look of satisfaction as his trained eyes and ears told him that this time all was well. He turned to the board to cut off the reserve dynamo, but with his hand on the switch paused as the superintendent approached, a troubled look on his face.

"Beale," he said, his voice pitched above the hum of machinery and the slapping of belt-lacings, "I've got a man to take your place. You're to go to the office and get your time."

A feeling as if an icy hand had clutched at his vitals passed through the tall man. Coolly, however, he made the disconnection and turned from the switchboard. "What's the matter?" he asked evenly. "Haven't I been making good here?"

"Yes," the "super" admitted uneasily. "I had you slated for a raise next week. I've got nothing against you."

"Then what's the trouble?" Beale insisted.

"Direct orders from the 'G. M.'—that's all I know." And the speaker shrugged his shoulders. An unpleasant bit of duty performed, he hastened away, leaving the electrician to puzzle the matter out for himself.

But scarcely had Beale time to give his plight further thought than the engineer was at his elbow, a competent-looking, middle-aged man, with prematurely gray hair.

"Sorry to lose you, Beale," the engineer growled, laying his grimy right hand on the Vermonter's shoulder. "I don't know what the trouble is, but—er—here's your successor. Show him the ropes. And stop in to say good-by to a feller before you beat it."

There was little to explain to the new man. He was as competent as he looked. And he, for his part, had little to explain. Chief electrician of an ocean steamship that had been torpedoed, his wife had persuaded him to take a shore berth. He had registered at an agency, and less than an hour before had been sent for. And here he was!

Slowly, thoughtfully, Beale made for his

locker and changed clothes. He wrapped a few personal belongings around some favorite tools that were like old friends, and after making a neat parcel sought the cashier's office and drew his pay. Then he headed for the lair of the general manager and made known his wants to the girl in the outer room.

She vanished within, but very shortly returned with the word: "He's busy and can't possibly see you. And he says it's no use anyway; that you're to get your money and get out of the building."

The Vermonter's bundle fell with a crash. His lean fingers twitched, his nostrils quivered, but his eyes and voice were steady as he told the astonished girl:

"I've drawn my money, but I won't leave the building till I see him personally. If he's really busy, I'll wait. Please go in and tell him so."

The girl was young and little voiced in office etiquette. For a few moments she hesitated, nervously clicking a pencil between her teeth; then, more afraid of the grim-looking person before her than of the temperamental G. M., she laid a hand on the door-knob and reentered the inner room.

Presently came a snarl, and on the threshold, a sheaf of papers in his hand, the bald-headed general manager stood and glared.

"You've got your pay!" he snapped. "What else do you want?"

"Yes, I've got my money," said Beale, shortly and bitterly—"but I think I'm entitled to know why you're letting me go. I've been steady here; worked overtime so's to get your power-plant in good order; and I've given you good and faithful service. And you turn around and can me without giving any reason. I want to know *why*?"

"Then, since you insist, I'll tell you," came the sneering reply. "It's because you're just out of State's prison after serving a term for robbery."

The pencil of the listening girl fell clattering to the linoleum. Her chin fell and her blue eyes widened. She shrank behind her desk as the ex-prisoner stopped twisting his cap and took a step toward the speaker. The latter retreated a little, but held his ground when he heard more mockery than

rage in the placid tones of his erstwhile employee.

"So *that* was it, was it? And you thought with all the platinum-points and gold and silver wire in the stockroom that you'd better not have a burglar around?"

Beale's diagnosis was accurate. The general manager felt that the ground had been covered. So he shrugged his shoulders and waved his papers as an indication that the interview was over.

"Just one moment," the Vermonter pleaded, as it flashed over him that the other was acting only within his rights. "I'm not making any trouble, you understand? I'm going right along; but I wish you'd tell me how you knew—where I'd been. Was it word from the police? Did they tip you off to my record?"

"No; it wasn't the police—I'll tell you that much. It was an anonymous note. And I'm a very busy man—"

Another question hovered on Beale lips; but it died unborn when he saw the door closed in his face and realized that he was wasting his time and needlessly scaring the girl-buffer by remaining longer. With a tightening of his lips, avoiding the sidelong glances of the timid girl, he picked up his bundle and strode down the corridor.

He was too full for words, so he waved a farewell to the timekeeper and watchman at the outer door. Then he crossed to the corner and stood waiting for a car. Presently it came along and he swung aboard; but meanwhile, from the tail of his eye, he had seen a well-built fellow wearing a dark-green fedora leave a cigar-store diagonally across the street from the factory entrance. And this man had walked to the corner above, and had preceded him aboard the same car.

Beale eyed the back of the shadower as he stood at his post on the motorman's platform, nonchalantly looking over the head-lines of an early afternoon paper and shifting his position now and then to glance with seeming carelessness into the car's comfortably filled interior. On such occasions the ex-prisoner would turn his eyes squarely to the front and indulge himself in inaudible and mirthless chuckles while reflecting with what ease he had "made"

the different men told off to tail him since his release from prison.

"Gray Tie" had succeeded "Black Overcoat," and in turn had given way to a serious-faced person in spectacles who looked to be almost anything but a detective. And now for three days the man with the glasses had been invisible, and "Mr. Green Fedora" was on the job.

The Brooklyn Bridge was crossed and Beale plunged into the subway. The express was by no means crowded at that hour, and from his seat he could see his shadow swaying side by side with the guard on the rear platform of his car.

As the Grand Central was reached and Beale crossed the platform to a waiting "local," the temptation came to him to turn abruptly and denounce his shadower. He was on the point of doing this, when came the thought to him: "What's the use? I'm going to fool the cops, anyway. And *they* never tipped off that firm that an 'ex-con' was working there. They don't do business of that sort with anonymous notes."

Musing over the developments of the day, a little regretful that he was out of work, yet taking grim satisfaction in the thought that the "big plan" still held good, the Vermonter gained his room and spent the afternoon smoking, reading, and in deep reflection. Green Fedora paced up and down before the lunch-room where his quarry ate a light supper, and then tailed him directly back to his lodgings.

And there the trail ended for the day, for while the temporary hush of the theater hours stole over feverish Broadway, Edward Beale turned out his gas and went to bed.

CHAPTER IV.

A "POISON-PEN" PRODUCTION.

BETWEEN tidewater and a New Jersey city of the second class, its flimsy buildings straggling over a snow-quilted moor, the shell-loading plant of the American Munitions Company, Inc., was entering upon its second year of existence and furnishing work at wages unheard of before in the annals of day labor.

"Able-bodied and American-born," was the countersign which admitted one to the presence of the chief of the works, a West Point man, whose army career had been interrupted by an irregular functioning of the heart, and a strict disciplinarian who insisted on a personal inspection of each and every prospective employee.

In this plant Edward Beale found work, and was searched twice daily for matches before being permitted to enter the packing-room, where he had been assigned. Armed guards in khaki patrolled the aisles between lofty tiers of empty cases, keeping sharp lookout for unseemly or suspicious action. Picked men in rubber-soled shoes, bearing air-guns in the hollows of their arms, watched with jealous care the loading-house and central magazine. There was a bewildering network of barbed-wire fencing around the wooden buildings, and a score of outside men with rifles and fixed bayonets and orders by night to challenge but once before pressing trigger.

Commuting to New York was no pleasure, the work of screwing down lids on the stenciled and becketed cases was uninteresting, but Beale took a delight in his novel surroundings and at the prospect of piece-work and big pay when a vacancy should occur at one of the many automatic machines in the room beyond him.

Christmas drew near. His first pay-day was close at hand, and he was wondering one morning whether or not to look for room and board in the New Jersey city, twenty minutes' ride distant, when he heard his name spoken and looked up to find an office messenger at his side.

"Cap'n Craig wants you," the boy said. "You're to report to him right away. Here's your office pass."

Beale grunted, straightened up and laid down his screw-driver. He paused only to wipe his dripping face and roll down his sleeves, then he strode down the covered passageway between the orderly rows of fire-buckets and extinguishers, and exhibited the stamped slip of paper to the guard in the office corridor.

The man nodded and took up the pass. Beale found the right door, knocked, and was told to enter. For the second time he

faced the keen brown eyes of the West Point ordnance expert, and knew at a glance that he had not been summoned for promotion.

"Here's a letter that reached me this morning," came gruffly from the "big chief" of the works. "It concerns you. It's unsigned. On general principles I'd throw it in the waste-basket, but my duty to the directors compels me to forget personal inclination. You realize, of course, that I'm responsible for the personnel of this plant? And that it might be unsafe to have questionable characters around the premises?"

"Yes," Beale muttered through set teeth.

"Read this letter, then, and tell me if its contents are true." The straight-backed man in gray tweed handed Beale a half sheet of bond paper, one side of which was covered partly with typewriting.

Wonderingly the Vermonter took the letter. "Why all this palaver?" he asked himself. "Why doesn't he fire me at once and be done with it?" Possibly the answer lay in the contents of the letter itself.

He turned it right side up and read:

You are advised that you have a man in your employ who may or may not be using his right name. In any event we understand that he is working in your shipping department, having been hired by you on the 18th inst.

Edward Beale, the man referred to, an electrician by trade, is a menace wherever he goes, and no doubt has taken employment with you for no honest purpose. It is a matter of court record that he was convicted of burglary, and sentenced to five years' imprisonment at hard labor. It is only a few weeks since he was released from Auburn Prison.

You are advised further that we have no personal feelings against this man Beale, and that our warning to you is prompted solely by a desire to put you on your guard against an unscrupulous man, who is far deeper than he seems. In justice to your firm there is but one action you can take in the matter.

Confidentially yours,

Beale finished reading and raised his eyes. His fingers trembled as he folded the communication once across and tossed it contemptuously upon the desk, but the trembling was born of the anger which smoldered within him rather than of fear for the present or for the future. His "plan," though threatened, still held good.

"Well, what about it?" the ex-officer asked, not unkindly, as he leaned back in his chair and studied the flushed face of the man before him.

"Part of it's true—part of it's a damned lie!" Edward Beale both admitted and denied. He swallowed dryly. His eyes avoided those of the West Pointer as, frankly ashamed of his record, he continued: "It's true that I'm an electrician; and it's true that I was convicted of burglary and sent away for five years. But the rest of that poison-pen production is a mess of lies! I never, knowingly, stole a dime in my life, or helped anybody else to steal. I couldn't make a judge and jury believe it, though, so I'm not going to try my story on you."

A ghost of a laugh came hollowly from him. Still the manager sat mute, fascinated by the play of emotion on the lean face of the other. Were this man in the works for some evil, ulterior purpose, he was a clever actor as well as a consummate rascal. On the other hand, he might be a wholesome sort of fellow, after all—a toy of circumstance.

The silence, protracted, became awkward. The Vermonter felt called upon to say something. Now he raised his eyes, and with neither fear nor shame in them, faced the man in the chair and spoke dispassionately to him.

"I'm pretty sure I know who wrote that letter; and I guess I know the reasons behind it. That's *my* affair, however; something for *me* to settle when the time comes. So, now, if you don't care about having an ex-convict on the pay-roll, I'll run along and get my time. And I want to thank you for calling me in and letting me know, man to man, why I was being let go. The last boss I had was kind of secretive, not to say brutal, about it."

Beale paused and stood waiting for the verbal ax to fall. But Captain Craig's first words were an agreeable surprise.

"You're taking entirely too much for granted, my man," he snapped, "for I intend keeping you right on the pay-roll—although possibly not as a packer. Even if you *were* a desperate burglar, there's nothing here to steal except powder and

bulky machinery and petty cash in the office safe outside. And I don't believe even a rat could get by our guards, day or night—unless it was a very black night and a damned small rat. The main things I have to look out for here are fire, explosions, and spies. You took an oath the morning you got your badge and was photographed. The day you applied for work you stated your birth-place was Burlington, Vermont. And you gave the date. While you were taking the oath I had lying before me telegraphic confirmation from Burlington regarding your birth, and supplementary data which told me you came from Scotch and English stock on both sides.

"And that's all I want to know; for all the German gold in the world couldn't hire a Vermonter of Scotch-English extraction to blow up these works. I'm paid my salary here to get shell loaded—not to run a tea-room. And if second-story men, and pick-pockets, and bigamists—leaving *your* character out of the question—can load shell better or faster than the bunch I've got here now, why, damn me if I don't substitute 'em—if they're Yankee-born. Some day when I've got more time I'm going to get you to spin me that unbelievable story of yours. And, now, tell me, what kind of an electrician are you? What's your specialty?"

So disconcerting was the brusque pleantry of the captain, so abruptly had he put the two questions, that for a few seconds Beale found himself at a loss for words.

But presently he managed: "Why—er—I suppose you might call me an all-around man. I went to Lynn from Vermont after my parents died, and put in six years with the General Electric people there. Then I came to New York and joined the Edison emergency crew. I left them for the Bell phone, and then I worked nearly five years for the Jones Protective Concern. That was my last real job, except—"

Edward Beale's gaze shifted to his knuckles. He breathed deeply as his thoughts reverted to the dynamo-room at Auburn—the stuffy little place which became a veritable chamber of horrors on those black days when the State electrician

groomed the generators in person before presiding at the switchboard to hurl the death-juice.

Captain Craig's voice broke in. "I'm something of an electrical man myself," he warned. "Maybe you can tell me the amount of resistance in a mile of No. 4 bare copper wire—without having to look in a book."

The ex-prisoner smiled at the quizzical air of the West Pointer. "That's not so hard," he said. "In still air, at 75 Fahrenheit, a mile of standard No. 4 annealed ought to offer a little better than one, point, thirty-one."

The captain nodded approvingly, then put still another question. "Suppose, in a direct-current machine, your armature-teeth or lugs set up such a humming that you got to thinking you were in a sawmill, what would you do?"

"That would depend. I might slope the end of the pole-piece so the armature wouldn't pass all the edges at once. I might see fit to decrease the magnetism of the field. Or the magnetic capacity of the teeth could be—"

"Very good," the captain growled. He scribbled something on a printed card and blotted his writing with care. Thoughtfully he fingered the bit of pasteboard for a moment or two while studying the face of the man standing before him. Then he held out the card.

"Here's a pass that will admit you to any department of this plant," he said, a grave note in his tone. "I'm going to give you a chance to see how bright you can shine—how much error you can dig up. I want a detailed report of everything electrical on the premises: lighting, wiring, outside alarm, fire signals and automatic thermostats; intra-telephone and all. I want both criticism and recommendations. Take your time for a thorough inspection, but if you find anything very rotten, report it to me without delay. D'you understand?"

Beale nodded and murmured his thanks for the confidence placed in him. Then he listened as the captain continued:

"From now on you're on the roll at thirty-five a week. Make good, and you'll be drawing fifty by Washington's Birthday.

That's all. Get what you need at the stock-room—and tell the chief engineer I said to let you have what instruments you need for tests."

Edward Beale's throat felt dry and uncomfortable as he turned and groped for the knob of the door. Surely the plan was worth while after all; and the world—not a bad place to live in.

"Here!" the captain barked, and with a disdainful finger pushed the anonymous letter across the desk. "Take these kind words along with you and keep 'em for a souvenir. Maybe you can figure out who the writer is, and what kind of an ax he's grinding."

CHAPTER V.

BEALE'S STORY.

AUDIBLY damning the war and the coal situation which left a great city shivering, mentally damning the income tax and the necessity—for show purposes—of subscribing to the latest Liberty Loan, Mr. Albert Jones sat in his office one freezing day in early March. An oil-heater burned beside him and made up in a measure for the negligible amount of steam in the radiators of his office-suite. He had listened to the routine verbal morning report of the chief of his night patrol, and had looked over his mail.

A heap of bills lay at his elbow. Expenses for February had been unusually heavy for such a short month, and now it occurred to the provider of protection that he must find some way of protecting his own funds against the insidious monthly "overhead." He pawed over the bills, selected two, and thumbed the buzzer-button under the edge of his desk. His stenographer appeared, note-book and pencil in hand.

"Miss Ryan," Jones grated while frowning at one of the bills, "the telephone charges for last month were something frightful. If you people think you can use the phone for personal foolishness, why, you're badly—"

He broke off as he looked up and noted with surprise that the girl wore a heavy

jacket, and that a fluffy fur boa encircled her neck. And then it came to him that there was no oil-heater in the outer office—and that dependable stenographers were hard to get at before-the-war salaries. Quite abruptly Jones modified his tone as he resumed:

"I wish you'd please tell the clerks and the switchboard girl that I want them to confine their personal calls strictly to emergencies such as fire and sudden illness. There's a pay station and booths downstairs, where social affairs can be discussed at the noon hour. That's all. But, just a moment—" Jones eyed the second bill he had selected. "Have that telephone girl get the Ahern Agency right away on this wire. I want Mr. Ahern personally."

The connection established, Jones proceeded to vent his feelings. "It's about that Beale case—last month's bill was something fierce," he explained and complained. "Can't you cut it?"

"Don't see how we can," Ahern boomed cheerfully. "I'm givin' you a No. 1 man for practically six dollars a day and carfare. I'd charge anybody else eight. Since the gimper moved to Elizabeth I've found that one man can cover him to and from that steady job at the munitions works, as well as to put him to bed at night. You're gettin' off cheap; but, as I told you before: you're throwin' your money away. The bill's pared down to the quick. Will we call it off?"

Jones fidgeted and ran a finger around his collar. "No," he said, "I wouldn't feel safe with no watch at all on him. *You* think he's going straight. *I* think different. According to my notion he's only working steady long enough to pile up a little stake for instruments and tools. He may break out any time. The sooner the better—as long as you nab him in the act and we get him put away for a long stretch. Isn't there any way I can save expenses while having an eye on him?"

A pause followed. Ahern gave the matter a modicum of thought, and then proposed: "We might work it this way: I can send a good man over two or three times a week to tail him after he leaves the plant for the day. This will slice your expense

down to chicken-feed and give us a line on anything he may be dopin' out. And if he leaves his job, or does anything out o' the ordinary, we can clap the 'close-tail' on again."

"All right; I'll leave it to you." And President Jones hung up the receiver, a little doubtful that he was playing safe.

Edward Beale, however, was playing safe, and day by day was making conditions safer at the shell-loading plant on the moors. His inspection had not only uncovered three instances of imperfect and dangerous wiring, but had disclosed an overloaded power circuit.

A system of vitrified conduit had endeared him to the appreciative captain, and the installation of a mischief-proof barrier of outside alarm wires had resulted in a second boosting of his salary.

March passed, and the ex-prisoner noted that only from time to time was he shadowed. Twice during the month he absented himself from the munitions works long enough to run over to New York and visit an electrical-supply house; and on the second occasion, while leaving one of the down-town entrances of the "tube," an Ahern man on his way to Jersey for the tri-weekly tab-keeping recognized his quarry and followed him.

A report that Edward Beale had purchased nearly one hundred dollars' worth of electrical supplies and instruments, had taken them to his room in Elizabeth, and had kept his light burning until "all hours," brought quick action from President Jones. Immediately the "double-tail" was clapped on, and for weeks, while outside the loading plant, a skilful operative was never more than a few hundred feet distant from the ex-prisoner. Beale noted the renewal of the close watch, but it amused him instead of annoying him. Night after night he spent behind drawn window curtains—working, calculating, or pacing the floor and figuring how best he could reap the fruit of bitter, solitary years of thought. And what he accomplished during these nights of planning and labor was left behind locked doors, safe from spying eyes and prying fingers—even those of his landlady, who, overburdened with flesh,

was only too glad to have a steady lodger who paid his way promptly and saved her the trouble of climbing the stairs by doing his own chamberwork.

There came an evening in April when the ex-prisoner felt "stale." It had been a hard day for him at the works. His eyes were tired and his brain was weary.

"Guess I deserve a night at the theater," he told himself as he put on a freshly pressed suit and spent an extra minute in the tying and "lay" of a new four-in-hand.

It was weeks since Beale had spent an evening in New York, and he noted that the uniformed men were thicker than ever. Fully a fourth of the theater audience was in olive-drab. Really, the big war was a hard thing to forget, even when one sought amusement after a hard day in a shell-loading plant. A newspaper held by a man in the row in front of Beale shrieked war news in every column-heading visible. The orchestra played "The Star-Spangled Banner" while the audience stood, and as the curtain went up the comedian's first joke was a quip based on the latest boast of Wilhelm the Mad.

The farce—as light and frothy as its name—at an end, and Beale sought a chop-house famous for its baked potatoes and musty ale. He wanted none of the latter, but hankered for a thick mutton-chop and a serving of "deep-dish" pie. He entered, and, looking around for a table, was surprised to see Captain Craig beckon him toward the corner where he was sitting alone.

"Sit down here, Beale," the West Pointer invited him cordially. "I've got a porterhouse on the fire. What are you eating? It's on me."

The Vermonter hesitated, then slipped somewhat uneasily into the chair facing his superior.

As if reading his thoughts, the captain leaned over and clapped a hand on his shoulder. "Cheer up, man!" he said jovially. "You're above the draft age. And the Germans haven't a chance in the world. Give your order to the smiling waiter."

As a matter of fact Beale had given little thought to drafts—present or future—but he now felt more at ease and gave his order.

"Bottle o' beer, mug of bitter ale?" the captain supplemented.

The Vermonter shook his head. "It's more than four years since I've touched anything of that sort. I—guess I won't."

Captain Craig became thoughtful. For some moments he studied the sober face of his electrician-in-chief, and then leaned back and blew a succession of smoke-rings ceilingward.

"Beale," he said at length, lowering his voice, "I'm going to let you into a little secret. Keep it to yourself for the present. I'm leaving the plant very shortly. My assistant succeeds me."

"I'm sorry you're going, sir," the Vermonter said, his surprise giving way to speech. "We'll certainly miss—"

"I'm not sorry I'm going; I'm *glad*; for I'm going into active service—where I belong. I found a sensible board of medical examiners and convinced them that my heart was as good as ever it was—even better. And I'm to be colonel of a brand-new engineer regiment equipped by private subscription. I hope to be in France within forty days."

Barely had Beale time to ponder over this development of the day before the West Pointer added another bit of information—this a matter directly bearing upon the future of the Vermonter himself.

"And if I were you," the captain went on, "I'd put in my spare time looking around for another berth. That English contract will be finished in a few weeks, and then I'll stake my new commission that the Jersey plant will shut down for several months while they build new machinery for shells of different caliber. There'll be no place on the pay-roll for a high-priced master electrician until they start up again, and in these days of delayed deliveries and scarce steel it 'll probably be well toward winter before they can start in loading shell. This is unofficial—just a friendly tip to you."

The arrival of the captain's steak, followed shortly by the serving of Beale's chop, acted as a damper on the rather one-sided conversation; but, as the ex-prisoner refused for the second time either ale or beer, remarking, "It got me into a lot of

trouble once," Captain Craig thought of the story this man had locked in him—the story which neither judge nor jury had believed.

"I'd like to hear that yarn of yours," the captain said after he had drained his pewter mug, and two cigars were burning evenly. "Unless," he continued, "the telling of it should stir up disagreeable thoughts."

Beale sipped the last of his black coffee and took a long pull at his cigar. "I don't mind telling it to *you*," he said presently, "even if I don't convince you that I was innocent of the crime I was sent up for. But it's a long story."

"Go ahead," the captain urged, interested more than he was prepared to admit in this lank New Englander who had proved himself to be such a competent electrician.

"The story commences," Beale began, "when I started in to work for Mr. Jones, the head of the Jones Protective Company. When he found I knew my business, he promoted me until I became second installation foreman. But he never kept his promises about raising my pay, and two or three little improvements, that I might have had patented in my own interest, he had patented in the name of the company. The longer I worked for Jones the better I got to know him and the less I thought of him personally. They say that he practically stole his method of electric protection from an Italian, who went crazy and died a pauper. I know nothing personally about *that*, but I *do* know that Jones wasn't a man of his word, and that for petty crookedness and downright meanness it would be hard to find his equal. He pays his patrolmen two dollars a night, and gives 'em second-hand, greasy uniforms to wear. The section chiefs in the district alarm-stations in the cities get better pay, of course. But *they* are men who may have to turn out in the middle of the night and face armed burglars. So they get twenty-one dollars a week—not including pistols and night-sticks. They have to get those of a certain pattern through the company. And Jones pockets a commission on each forced purchase."

Captain Craig's mouth worked as if the flavor of his cigar had suddenly become

distasteful to him. Beale noted the grimace and attributed it to a lack of interest in the petty graftings of President Jones.

"I could go on for an hour," Beale resumed, "telling you about the contemptible tricks of this man Jones, but I'll cut it short and skip along to the week of the bankers' convention. That's pretty near five years' back. Makers of safes and vaults and burglar-alarms got their heads together a few weeks before, and decided that, with all these 'prospects' in the city, it would be a good stunt to get up a little semi-private sort of an exposition for 'em. So a vacant floor was hired and rigged up and decorated, and Jones took space to demonstrate his burglar-proof protective method.

"His foreman was—wasn't—er—feeling well at the time, and Jones asked me to set up our wires and batteries and partitions around a sample safe, and to have a big placard lettered offering any electrical expert five thousand dollars if he could get through the barrier and lay a hand on the knob of the safe door without ringing the alarm-bell.

Three days before the bankers' convention opened I had everything ready at our little exposition—placard and all. I went over to the office, reported, and, as it happened to be pay-day, I got my envelope from the bookkeeper. When I opened it I could hardly believe my eyes, for Jones had given me a flat promise the week before to boost my pay an even five dollars. The old twenty-five was there. And that was all. Jones was out for the day, so I couldn't read the riot act to him there on the spot. I went home and lay awake half the night, wondering what to do. There were dozens of places where I could have gone and earned more money; but I liked the installation work and the traveling around and meeting nice people. It was a good deal better than climbing poles and taking all kinds of chances in wet weather on high-voltage circuits; better even than a steady job at good pay in some department-store or hotel dynamo-room.

"Well, just as I'd about decided to forget it for the night and go to sleep, I happened to think about the five-thousand-dollar reward to any person who could beat

the Jones system. And right then and there it flashed over me how such a thing could be done!

"I turned this over and over in my mind until I felt sure that I was right, and then, without any definite idea just how I'd use this knowledge, I rolled over and slept like a baby. The next morning I tackled Jones about the increase I didn't get. He whined about big expenses. I told him what I thought of him. He got mad and fired me then and there. Then I sprung it on him that his protective system was a bluff, and that any good electrician could beat it by giving the matter a little study. He asked me sarcastically if I thought I could beat it. When I told him I could, he almost went up into the air.

"But he calmed down after a bit and crossed the office to his big safe. This was 'protected' and connected up for demonstration purposes with an alarm bell in the outer office. The steel doors of the safe were closed. Jones slammed shut the outside doors of woven copper wire under mahogany veneer, and then stepped outside and threw on the switch under the alarm. Every few seconds the little 'safety bell' tinkled and indicated that the protection was 'on.'

"'We'll assume,' said Jones when he came back, 'that you can force or cut through the metal of the safe itself. So I've left the bolts unthrown. Now let's see you get past the protective casing without ringing the big alarm bell.'

"He stood back and glared at me. I asked for five minutes to get some tools and instruments from the stock-room in another part of the building. I found what I wanted and hurried back. Then I insisted that Jones leave the room while I opened the safe. He objected at first, but as it was my idea to make him pay for my discovery I told him I wouldn't turn a hand till he got out. 'All right,' he snapped at last, 'I'll leave you here alone for fifteen minutes. But first I'm going to make a test or two.'

"'Go as far as you like,' I told him, and then watched him as he turned the knob of the wooden paneled door.

"Barely was it opened a crack and the connections broken before the big alarm

gong boomed. Jones closed the door. The gong stopped its clamor. Now Jones took a penknife from his pocket and stuck the blade deep into one of the polished side panels. As the steel passed through the outer sheet of foil and the non-conducting filler there was nothing doing till the point touched the inner layer of foil and short-circuited the system. Again the big gong boomed. Jones pulled out his knife. The ringing stopped and the little safety bell took up its tinkling. Then Jones turned to me and sneered, 'Make good your bluff.'

"I locked the door behind him and hung my hat over the keyhole. I worked fast, and in twelve minutes by my watch I turned the knob of the inside doors and opened everything up wide. Then I called Jones in and waved toward the open safe. 'What d'you think of the bluff now?' I asked.

"The old man grew red. He cocked his ears for the tinkle of the little bell, and when he heard it he looked at me. His mouth was wide open. He looked like another person. He staggered over to the safe and shut and opened the protective doors several times. He grabbed up a steel letter-opener and stuck it savagely into the mahogany panels at the side and rear. No alarm gong boomed the danger signal, and the little safety bell went on with its deceitful tinkle that all was well.

"'Great God!' I heard him whisper. He got as pale as death. His hands shook and his knees trembled as he almost tumbled into a chair. I was beginning to feel a little sorry for him when all of a sudden he stiffened up and asked me how I'd worked the trick. I told him that was *my* secret. Then he began to abuse me. He said I'd ruined him—called me a scheming crook.

"At that I opened up on him. 'Why, you dollar-snatching old crab,' I said, 'I wouldn't use this knowledge for dishonest purposes. If I weren't loyal to you I'd tip off some electrician how to win that five thousand dollars. We'd show you up to the bankers' convention and go fifty-fifty. Don't you dare call *me* a crook!'

"When he calmed down a bit and sat dry-washing his hands, he thought of soft-

soaping me into telling him the fault of the system. But when I thought of the idea for a rheostat he'd practically stolen from me I hardened my heart. He told me he'd take me back on the staff at a bigger salary if I'd keep my mouth shut. I laughed in his face and told him I was through. Then an idea came to me.

" 'Pay me five thousand dollars,' I proposed, 'for my rheostat you patented, and I'll show you how your system can be beaten. And I'll go on my way and promise not to breathe it to a living soul.'

" 'You'd think I asked the old tightwad for a quarter of a million, such a holler he put up. But I stuck to my price and sat smiling while he raved. In the end he got out his checkbook, driven by foolish fear, for I'd never have gone out of my way to show him up. He filled out a check and shoved it at me. 'Now show me!' he snarled.

" 'Send this over to the bank and have it certified first,' I stipulated. He did this, and some ten minutes later, just as I was pocketing the certified check the installation foreman was announced. The old man trusted him, absolutely, so then and there I showed the pair of 'em how simple it was to get through the foil and wires of the celebrated Jones system. And within half an hour I was at the bank counting more money than I'd ever seen before in my life."

A long pause followed. Edward Beale's cigar had gone dead. He sat silent for fully a minute, frowning at his empty coffee cup. Then, mechanically, he lit the fresh cigar which Captain Craig handed him. There was a sober note in his tone, as, his eyes still averted, he resumed:

" 'I'm far from proud of the next few weeks—they reflect no credit on me or my bringing up. You see I came of clean, straight people. They died about the time I quit high school, and during the years that followed I'd worked so hard for such little money that I had no idea of the evils of idleness and a fat pocketbook. That five thousand dollars looked like a fortune to me. I took a small suite in a hotel not far from Broadway and started in on my idea of enjoying life. I was at some theater

or other every night. I never got up before noon, and from then on till theater time I'd usually be found around 'Eddie's Place,' playing the races with the handbook men that made it their headquarters. And I did pretty well at the start. I was lucky. I spent my money freely, and judging by the way the barflies would crowd around and clap me on the shoulder you'd think I was the most popular man on Broadway.

" 'Well, the weeks passed and my luck fluctuated. I was traveling with the fastest kind of people, and almost before I realized it I found myself averaging twenty or thirty drinks a day. I still felt all right physically, though, and I still had plenty of money in the safe at my hotel. 'Care is only good for killing cats,' I told myself, and kept on with the high-balls. So I got to know a lot of people: show-girls engaged and disengaged, vaudeville hams that were always touching me for laundry money, bartenders and jockeys and head waiters and gamblers—the bunch that turns day into night and makes the upper Tenderloin what it is to-day.

" 'I got what you might call 'half wise,' and learned to protect my bankroll while I was floating around, but it never occurred to me that some of the people I met and associated with nightly were out-and-out crooks of the worst kind. There was a quiet-mannered, smooth-shaven little man who posed as a retired advertising agent, for instance. He always wore gloves, carried a cane, and with his fine tailoring and polite ways he was apparently quite the gentleman. 'Mr. Burdick,' he called himself, 'lover of bright lights and good food.' He never drank anything stronger than mineral water or ginger ale, but he had plenty of money and seemed to be always buying drinks for others."

Edward Beale laughed and reached for his glass of water.

" 'I have reason to believe,' he went on after a swallow, "that his man Burdick is one of the cleverest burglars in the country. He'd never consider a job unless it promised a swag of a hundred thousand or so. And he never, so far as I know, made any mistakes. Then there was another all-nighter with dark clothes, gloves, and an ebony

cane. One look at his wavy gray hair and into his honest blue eyes, and you'd trust him with anything in the world. He looked like a big hearted missionary. Yet, in fact, he was a roper-in on commission for 'Straight John' Connor's sure-thing place in Thirty-Eighth Street. And he'd killed two men in a gamblers' feud out on the coast.

"There were gunmen in tuxedos, manicured and massaged, who patronized the all-night places where I ate and drank and sat around in until either daylight or the cops drove us out, but at the time I didn't know 'em for what they really were—and this brings me close to the end of my story."

Beale took a long drink of water and smiled at the captain.

"I was the easiest kind of a mark," he said, "and all that happened to me was due to the fact that I talked too much when I had liquor aboard. Otherwise I suppose I'd have gone broke in time and got acquainted with honest work again."

Beale thought for an instant, then asked quite abruptly: "Have you ever heard of Billie Clancy's place under the street on Seventh Avenue?"

Captain Craig smiled and nodded. "I've heard of it," he said. "I've never been there. They say the owner has influence in high police circles, I believe—drink and song all night."

"That's the place. And that's where my finish began. There was a bunch of us around a table about two o'clock one morning when a boy came down with the newspapers. There was an account of a big bank burglary in Chicago, and somebody suggested that any bank that was too miserly to put in electric protection *ought* to get trimmed. Then the talk started about what a wonderful thing the Jones system was, and how absolutely burglar-proof it made a room or a vault. I'd been losing steadily for a week, was drinking heavier than usual, and at the time was pretty well gingered up. I gave a snort at the last speaker, and bragged that I could beat the Jones system, and *had* beaten it.

"Burdick sat as solemn as an owl, cutting the heart out of a porterhouse steak and listening to the chatter. He never said

a word, but he didn't seem to have much appetite for his food, and in spite of my being half-soused I can remember that he sat chewing slowly and watching one of the girl singers ruffle the hair of the pianoplayer. My announcement didn't make the sensation I expected, for the boys didn't believe me. They started in kidding me and calling me 'Mr. Edison,' till I swore and boasted that for years I'd been an expert on the Jones Company staff, and that old Jones had paid me five thousand to show him how to beat his own method. Next thing I knew Burdick had slipped away, the subject was changed, and we were matching coins for prints of Clicquot.

"It might have been an hour later when Burdick came back. There was a richly dressed woman with him, all in silks and furs, and a dark-complexioned man with sharp eyes and red lips and a little toothbrush mustache. Burdick introduced them as Mr. Newbourne and his sister, and we all got friendly so fast that within ten minutes I was dancing with the lady and she was showing me a new step. She was both pretty and graceful—seemed to take a liking to me right away. She had fine eyes, soft hands all covered with expensive rings. There was a faint suggestion of a bunch of fresh violets being whisked under a fellow's nose whenever she came near one. I liked her better than any girl I'd met; and for a country boy from Vermont I figured I was going some when she asked me what my first name was and told me to call her Grace.

"Maybe an hour passed. It was near four and the cabaret people were getting ready to go home. There was nobody in the place except our party and the help, and while Newbourne was ordering more wine, Grace and I took a final whirl on the floor. When we got back to the big table and I bowed her to a seat, I found Burdick and Newbourne talking about the Chicago burglary. I was more interested in the entries at Juarez that day than I was in burglaries, and my somewhat muddled mind was full of thoughts of the starry-eyed beauty across the table from me, but I had to put in a word of defense when Burdick happened to mention that I claimed to know

how to beat the Jones system, and Newbourn gave me the horse laugh. 'It's true!' I almost shouted, stung by the laugh. 'I can beat it without ringing a bell; and I've got money that says so.'

"I pulled out a wad of bills and shook it at Newbourn. But he patted me on the shoulder and told me to put my money away. 'This is bad news to me,' he said, 'if you're sure you're not mistaken. I'm a customer of the Jones Company. I'd hate to think my stock wasn't absolutely protected against thieves.'

"Burdick leaned over and whispered to me: 'Newbourn's a big wholesale and manufacturing furrier. He's a good fellow, too.'

"I mulled this over for a minute. I didn't want the man to worry or to start anything with Jones. He was spending his money like a prince—and he had a mighty fine sister. 'Look here, Mr. Newbourn,' I said, 'I stumbled on my discovery you might say by accident. The burglars don't know it, and probably never will. The secret is safe with me. Don't you lose ten minutes' sleep. I'm no crook.'

"Soon after that Newbourn drew me one side and asked me if I was serious about my claims. I must have convinced him of that, for he asked me if I could give him a demonstration on his storage vaults downtown. I told him that such a thing was possible, but that I'd rather not. 'Why not?' he came back at me. 'Are the tools or instruments bulky or expensive?'

"'No, it isn't that,' I explained. 'I've got everything I'd need over in my rooms. I could almost stuff the gear into my overcoat pocket. The fact is, I'm through with electrical matters. I want to forget the Jones Company—forget that I ever worked for it.'

"Newbourn said no more on the subject. We went back to the table and the girl scolded us for leaving and talking in private. She was good-natured about it, though, and laughed when she said her brother ought to have better manners than to slight her on her birthday. 'Sure enough! It is your birthday!' Newbourn shouted. Then he rapped on the table and ordered a magnum.

"I hated to leave good company—espe-

cially the girl—but I was groggy and knew I didn't appear at my best. But as I was breaking away the girl smiled at me and whispered something to her brother. 'By all means,' I heard him say, and then he turned to me. 'Mr. Beale,' he said, 'we're giving a little birthday dinner to Grace to-night. Just an informal affair—three or four of us—in our own apartment. Won't you join us?'

"I mumbled something about needing sleep, but the girl slipped her soft hand into mine and pouted like a spoiled baby. 'You have all day to sleep,' she said. 'I want you to come to my party to-night.'

"And of course I gave in. I scribbled down the address and the telephone number and promised to be on hand at eight that night. It was nearly daylight by that time. I went to my rooms and turned in till one o'clock. Then I had a bath and put in an hour in a barber's chair. All that afternoon I sat near a ticker and listened to the Juarez results, but my thoughts dwelt more on a certain pair of melting brown eyes than they did on what the ponies were doing in Mexico. I dropped about four hundred that day and checked against my last thousand, but I was almost happy when sharp at eight that night I showed up at the Newbourn apartment and was treated like a king.

"Burdick was there. He had an apron on and was shaking cocktails and bossing the caterer's man around. There was a fat, pleasant-faced fellow present, with a bald head and a scar just above his right eyebrow. He was introduced to me as 'Uncle Tim,' and he made himself mighty agreeable. Merriment and music and wine seemed to be the program for the evening, and along about eleven o'clock, when the caterer's man had gone and I was feeling my best, Grace asked me to see what was wrong with a baseboard outlet that connected with a fancy lamp. I fixed a loose socket bushing and plugged in the lamp, and the young woman began to brag about my qualifications as an electrician. And"—Edward Beale laughed a grim sort of a laugh and threw out a hand palm-up—"I dare say you can guess the rest of it."

"No; not exactly," the captain drawled.

"I suppose, though, that it was all a put-up job; that these crooks persuaded you to go down-town on a bet that you couldn't prove the protective system had a fault."

"You're a pretty fair guesser, captain," Beale admitted. "But you've got no idea how slick they put it over on me. I was comfortable where I was. I didn't want to go to Newbourne's business place—in spite of the best fur overcoat in stock he offered me if I could get in without setting off the alarm. They tantalized me and kidded me for being a bluffer, but I stood fire and told 'em the next afternoon I'd demonstrate that I was right. And then the temptress stepped in."

"She came close to me and put her lips to my ears. 'I believe you,' she said. 'Let's go down to-night and show that smart brother of mine that he's sometimes mistaken. I'll go along with you. We'll get a taxi and stop at your rooms while you get what you need, and then it's only a short run to Sixth Avenue and Twenty-Eighth Street. I want to see you win that fur overcoat. I know of one in stock that wholesales for three hundred and a quarter.'

"I didn't care so much about the overcoat as I did about pleasing the girl. She looked upon the trip as a lark. So we had a drink all around—except Burdick—and started. I shook hands with Uncle Tim, who said something about having to see a man at the Astor, and the four of us piled into a taxi. Long afterward I found out Tim left us to make certain arrangements with a crook-chauffeur who owned an electric moving-van. In fact it was 'Uncle Tim' himself who told me about it. He's in the bake-shop gang—at Auburn."

"It took me about ten minutes to find what I wanted at my place, then we ran down to Twenty-Eighth Street and turned west. It was a little before one o'clock. The lights were still lit in the corner saloons, and it was one of the coldest nights of the year. Half-way down the block we pulled up beside a three-storied brick building that must have been a residence at one time. There was a little alley at the far end of the building—as I remembered afterward—and right across the street the third and

fourth floors of a tall structure that housed a lot of cloak and suit firms were all lit up. They were probably working late on the Easter styles. Anyway, there was so much light coming out of the rows of windows that I could see the name, 'F. W. Newbourne,' in big gold letters between the second and third floors of the brick building.

"Newbourne paid the taxi driver and told him to come back in half an hour. Then he looked up and down the street. 'Maybe we ought to notify the Jones patrolman and the officer on the beat,' he said. But the girl clapped her hands and laughed. 'No,' she said. 'Let's go at it just as if we were a bunch of burglars.' And so that was the way we went about it. Newbourne took a key from his pocket and let us in the main door. With this shut behind us we found ourselves in a narrow corridor. Burdick flashed a pocket light around, and I saw various firm names on different doors. 'This way,' Newbourne said. 'I occupy the two floors above.' So we passed up the stairs and came to the corridor above."

"There were no windows in this passage, but there were three doors. One was the shipping-room entrance, one the general, and the other door was marked 'Private.' From the nature of the business and the layout of the rooms I knew the character of the 'protection.' It was what we called 'complete' work. Everything was wired: floors, ceilings, walls, windows, and doors. And there was a double alarm. One big gong on the premises to attract the local patrolman, and a connection with the master clock at district headquarters."

"I asked Newbourne which door he preferred. He shrugged his shoulders. 'Well,' I laughed, 'in about ten minutes you can open *all* your doors. I'm going to cut out your whole place.'

"I hadn't installed this particular job, but, of course, I knew how our inlet and outlet wires ran as a usual thing. I located them in the metal molding beside the door-casing of the shipping entrance. I pried out a section of the molding and laid bare the pair of insulated wires. But as I pulled out a knife Newbourne grabbed me by the wrist. 'Don't cut that wire, man,'

he said. 'You'll ring the alarm and make a fool out of us.'

" 'I'm not *going* to cut the wire,' I said. 'You watch me and maybe I can make an electrician out of you.'

"Grace giggled and patted me on the shoulder. Newbourn let go my wrist and held the light for me. They watched curiously as I got out my instruments and went to work, but I took good care that they didn't master the principle I was using. The area of the wired space made the job a little lengthy, but inside of fifteen minutes I stood up and told Newbourn to open his doors and show me my fur coat.

"He pulled out a big bunch of keys and handed the flashlight to Burdick. The light went out. While Burdick was fumbling with it, Newbourn was swearing and trying to find the right key. He got it at last. The light went on just as the door opened.

"Of course the alarm gong failed to go off. They all realized that fact. Newbourn stood on the threshold and seemed to be more saddened at knowing his protection wasn't what it was cracked up to be than he was because I'd won a three-hundred-dollar overcoat. He took it so seriously that Grace thought he was going to faint. She whipped a dainty little pocket-flask out of her muff and told him to take a nip and brace up.

"I was a little chilled myself. She didn't have to ask me twice. I took a fair pull at the flask and we went inside. We passed through the big bare showroom with its empty tables shining in the light that filtered through from across the street. Burdick had trouble with his lamp again, and by the time he had it going we were all in the rear stockroom and Newbourn had switched on a bulb.

"I never saw so much fur in all my life. Each side of the window facing on the alleyway was a bench piled high with red and white foxskins. Row upon row of costlier furs hung from lines of ceiling hooks. There were some finished cloaks of sealskin draped on manikins, and maybe half a dozen men's garments displayed on wire forms. Newbourn pointed out a beautiful coat lined with soft, dark marten, and Burdick held it for me while I tried it on.

"I commenced to feel queer about that time. Newbourn asked me whether the protection held good for the windows. I told him the whole system was 'dead' and that the master clock at headquarters was ringing 'O. K.' every two minutes. I thanked him for the coat. Then I staggered on my feet. I was dizzy—gasping for breath. Grace took me by the arm and led me down the stairs to get air. Burdick was ahead with the light. He opened the door, and curiously enough came face to face with Uncle Tim. There was a taxi waiting and chugging away at the curb, and the last I remember that night was being dragged toward it. I heard voices mumbling and whispering, and then a big purple cloud swooped down on me. It grew darker and darker—and I passed out."

"Knock-out drops," the captain mused.

Edward Beale nodded, and was silent for a time. Presently, a bitter, metallic quality in his voice, he concluded:

"Detectives found me at noon the next day, lying on the floor of the deserted Newbourn apartment all buttoned up in the fur overcoat. They shook me partly awake and gave me a ride to the Fourth Branch detective bureau. Old Jones was there, and tried to take a punch at me. It was twenty minutes or so before I realized that I'd been used as a catspaw by 'Abe and Aggie Meyers,' specialists in confidence and blackmail, assisted by 'Parson' Burdick and 'Bald Tim' Cronin, high-class burglars. Nearly a quarter of a million dollars' worth of furs had been spirited away, and I was the 'fall-guy.' I told the police my story, and they believed it—in spots. The judge took a nap while I told it in court. The jury sat yawning and winking. And when the judge woke up and sentenced me to five years, my lawyer told me I was lucky I hadn't been handed a seven-to-ten 'scratch.' And that's all there is to my story. Bald Tim left the rest of the gang in the city of Mexico, and was grabbed in New York a few weeks before I was released. I've never laid eyes on any of the others since that night. And now I'm a marked man—a *hounded* man, bec—"

"And a valued and trusted employee of

the American Munitions Company," the captain finished warmly.

Beale thanked him with a grateful look. And his smile broadened as the West Pointer added: "I believe your story—every word of it. And at the same time I can appreciate why a criminal court judge, who spends seventy per cent of his sitting time listening to perjury more or less patent, might not believe it. You admitted you made things safe for the gang; and you were found with part of the goods on your person. That was enough to damn you. I dare say the man you knew as 'Newbourne' had marked this fur establishment some time before you met him."

"Yes. And he'd rented a small office on the ground floor. That gave him the keys to the outside door and the privacy necessary to cut a hole in the ceiling. When he ran up against a screen of protective wires, he quit. It must have been soon afterward that Burdick brought him the glad news about my abilities. So they left me holding the bag. It's a wonder they didn't strip the fur coat from me. That was 'Exhibit B' at the trial."

"And I suppose it's your friend Jones who writes anonymous letters to your employers," the captain ventured. "I dare say he's unhappy because you're free."

"That's about the size of it, sir."

Captain Craig looked at his watch. He caught the eye of a waiter hovering near and settled the bill. "Beale," he said then, leaning across the table and laying a hand on the Vermonter's forearm. "I believe in you—and I want you to know it." Sympathy and understanding were in the eyes of the speaker as he added: "If you ever find yourself tempted to use your peculiar knowledge dishonestly, if you ever need a friend—come to me. Go straight, and you'll go fast and far."

CHAPTER VI.

FORCING HIS HAND.

FOR ten days the captain lingered at the plant, moody, fretful and impatient; then came a day when he appeared radiant in a new uniform. A con-

ference with the heads of the departments followed, and the West Pointer was whirled away over the moors.

Extra help was taken on. Now all hands were pressed and driven as the captain never had driven them. With a bonus at stake the new manager lost no time in completing the British contract. A week passed, and as the first of May approached gang after gang was laid off in the different departments. Finally the last shell was loaded, and the last becketed case trucked aboard the waiting cars on the spur line. Now the captain's prophecy came true. The word passed around that no more "seven-point-five" shells were to be made for the British, and that the works were to be closed while new machinery was building.

With several hundreds of others, Edward Beale found himself out of work, and the shell-loading plant left in the care of a handful of guards. It was with a little pang of regret that the Vermonter turned to look at the ugly buildings for the last time. He had done well there—had been given the squarest kind of a deal. The future loomed ahead dark and uncertain.

For three days and nights Beale labored in his room, snatching sleep now and then for an hour or so, and jealous even of the time devoted to coffee and sandwiches. Afternoon of the fourth day came, and the Ahern Agency man saw an express wagon draw up before the door of Beale's lodging-place. A heavy box and big suit-case were loaded aboard, whereupon the man-trailer longed to be in two places at once. If he followed the wagon on the supposition that Beale's property was on it, he would have to abandon the man. He decided against this, noted the license-number plate of the vehicle, and stuck to his post.

It seemed just as well, for shortly his man came out and the watcher saw him shake hands with his landlady. The trail was plain and easy. It led through the "Tube" and to the Grand Central. The detective was almost at Beale's elbow when he bought a ticket for Bridgeport, and as the former showed his mileage book to the gateman, he imagined his quarry turned and grinned at him.

The man-hunter was more careful now. He fell back and was contented with a seat in a car in the rear of the smoker where his man sat. Never as yet had the watched Vermonter attempted to evade his followers. It was worth while chancing that he wouldn't leave the train short of Bridgeport, and there he could be "picked up" again.

The afternoon passed. The train roared through the tunnels and covered ways of northern Manhattan, gained the open spaces where dandelions starred the lush grasses of spring. The electric locomotive uncoupled at Stamford. The coal-burner backed down and coupled with a jar that threw the "tailer's" head back. And for some few moments his head remained in this awkward position, for Edward Beale sauntered by along the aisle and grinned broadly and knowingly at him.

It was a disconcerted and chagrined shadow who called up the Ahern Agency the following day at noon and begged to be relieved.

"The party is wise he's tailed," he reported. "He 'made me' before we got on the train. He gave me the ha-ha on the way down. Now he's got a job at the Novelty Brass Works—wiring a new building. You'd better send down another operative and have him hang around the Tontine Hotel till I get in touch with him and tip him the layout."

Quick work followed, and four days later, when Edward Beale was flattering himself that although the police had not forgotten him, President Jones would think him still with the munitions concern, the blow fell. The superintendent who had hired him sent for him and asked gravely:

"Is it a fact or not that you're an ex-convict—that you were sent up for burglary?"

Beale looked into the cold gray eyes of the questioner, and read neither mercy nor understanding in them. Here was a man of fiber different from that of Captain Craig. Admit the truth, and forthwith he would be out of work. Yet, he realized, a lie would avail him nothing. His past wouldn't bear investigation, and here be-

fore him was a person who would probe until he could rest secure that his pay-roll was "pure."

"I suppose you got an anonymous letter?" Beale said stiffly.

The other nodded. "Is it true or not?" he demanded.

And bluntly and unflinchingly Beale answered. "Yes, it's true," he boasted proudly. "I'm an ex-con and a burglar—and a damned good one! Gimme my time as soon as you like."

Fires of vengeance smoldered in the breast of the Vermonter as he packed up his belongings, and the first train for the city found him aboard of it. This time Jones had gone too far. Everything had got to come to an end—likewise this cruel persecution. Now, for the first time, it occurred to him that these men who had followed him were not regular detectives—that they were private operatives retained by Jones. Granted that this were true, it had been easy for Jones to locate each new berth with such speed and precision.

"I'll call on Mr. President Jones," Beale vowed grimly, "and then I'll shake these ducks and get busy getting even."

For two days Beale haunted the premises of the Jones Protective Company, and being rather coolly informed that the president was in Baltimore, he became convinced by his watching that such was indeed the case. The Vermonter had no idea of wreaking physical vengeance on the old man. His age precluded that. Beale's object in a personal interview with his former employer was simply to fasten the responsibility for the unsigned letters. Once Jones were to admit the authorship, then the business of getting even could proceed. In Beale's mind there was scarcely the shadow of a doubt but that the letters had originated in the offices he was watching. But what he wanted was proof absolute.

Afternoon of the second day came. Watching was irksome. Yet there was little else to do. Were he to look for work and find another place, the human hound waiting at the door below would run him to earth. Then a fourth letter would go forth and damn his prospects. Now another way of fastening the responsibility came to

Beale. The letter Captain Craig had given him had been typed on medium-grade bond paper bearing the watermark "Glorio Bond." What might have been a lithographed or printed heading had been torn carefully from the top of the sheet. With this thought in his mind Beale entered the offices and leaned over the railing near the desk of Jones's secretary. At the moment there was no one in the room.

Beale's eyes roved over the desk. He saw a sheaf of letter-paper held by a paper-weight. He seized a sheet of this and held it to the light. And then his nostrils quivered and his lean jaw closed like a vise, for plain against the May sunlight the words "Glorio Bond" stood out.

The sound of approaching footsteps came to him as he stood there with the damning evidence in his hand. His mission was ended. He turned and slipped noiselessly out of the door and down the corridor.

The inevitable shadow, a well-set-up fellow in mixed tweed, followed Beale at a distance, saw him buy a paper and board a surface-car bound up-town. And from his post on the rear platform of the car he noted more, for as the quarry nonchalantly glanced over the head-lines of the news, folding the paper from page to page, the watcher saw him suddenly become intent on what he was reading.

Twice Beale read the article before pocketing the paper. Then he sat staring thoughtfully at the advertisements in the panel across the car from him. Not a word was he reading, however. He was planning and weighing chances as he had never weighed and planned before.

He left the car and gained the cheap hotel he had been patronizing. He packed his suit-case with all his earthly belongings, and paid his score. The heavy box from Elizabeth had been expressed elsewhere, for Edward Beale was now flying light.

"Here's where I lose the 'tailer,'" he muttered to himself as he descended the steps of the nearest subway station.

He saw Mixed Tweed saunter along behind him and drop a ticket in the chopper's box, yet he made no sign that he knew he was followed. He took a down-town train to an express station and crossed the bridge

to the up-town platform. An express roared in and halted. To the unsophisticated observer Edward Beale was the most unconcerned man in the world as he stood and twiddled his thumbs on the "local" side of the platform. The local pulled in, and the side-doors and end ones slid open. A gray-coated guard on the express side saw a man in mixed tweeds pass through the end door of the waiting local, and just as he was about to slam shut the side-doors of the express he saw a tall young man dash from the opposite side and duck under the arm of the waiting platform guard. It seemed there was a little disturbance as the train pulled out, and with a suit-case between his feet the tall young man sat and grinned through the glass of the side-door at a frantic individual in tweeds who pawed vainly at the varnish of the moving train.

Edward Beale had shaken and lost his tailer.

The next move of the Vermonter had been carefully thought out. It involved the hiring of a furnished room in the upper part of the city. This attended to and he took the "L" to the end of the route. The sun was low in the heavens when he climbed a wall and walked through a straggling orchard of blossoming apple-trees, but the air was warm and full of fragrance. He gained the crest of a knoll—a knoll which afforded a view of the sparsely built-up countryside beyond—and threw himself down.

It was a serious half-hour that followed. Beale knew only too well what the cost would be were he to go through with his plans and be caught. The smiling landscape faded, and in its place arose the frowning gray façade of Auburn prison. Again Beale lived through the agonies of his first hours in prison—shuddered as he recollected the first clang of the latticed gate, the rasp and rattle of the master bar on his tier in the cell-house.

The fragrance of the budding trees was no longer in his nostrils. Instead he sensed the horrible man-fetor of the prison—that stench indefinable, which clings and soaks wherever humans are caged like beasts.

A long time Beale lay and brooded over

the unproductive years which had followed his mistake. And then he breathed quickly and flushed anew as he thought of the tactics of Jones. "Pep" Connor was right: he was a marked man wherever he went. Were he to go straight and find another position it would be only a matter of time before Jones would locate him.

"If Captain Craig had stayed where he was," Beale mused, then kicked the turf in savage impotence. He was verily on the horns of a dilemma.

The sun went down behind the Jersey hills across the invisible Hudson. Moodily Beale watched the miracle, but his thoughts dwelt not on the bars of salmon and streaks of gold in the west. He drew the newspaper from his pocket, and in the fading light read for the third time the article which had attracted his attention earlier in the day. It ran, in part:

CATHCART MANSION FOR CONVALESCENT HOME.

It is stated on excellent authority that Gordon Cathcart, the well-known philanthropist and retired manufacturer of acids and chemicals, will, at an early date, turn over his upper Park Avenue palace to the New York City Chapter of the American Red Cross. A convalescent home for sick and wounded soldiers returned from France will be maintained there for the duration of the war.

Mr. Cathcart never does things by halves, and fortunate indeed will be the invalid heroes whose wants and comforts will be attended to in this mansion, which, since its completion some six years ago, has been one of the show-places of a city notable for the costly dwellings of its rich.

There was more to the article. It reviewed at some length the benefactions of Cathcart, the "Acid King." It touched upon the Laura Cathcart Memorial Hospital, a monument to an idolized daughter; the Cathcart Retreat for Lame and Crippled Children. It gave a paragraph to the death in France of Cathcart's sole heir, a nephew killed while directing the activities of an ambulance unit donated by his uncle. And the article concluded with a complimentary reference to a former generosity of the multimillionaire: the fitting-out, uniforming and equipping of the 403rd Engineers for early service in France—a body

of highly trained men officered by experts of scientific attainments who had shone in civilian life.

"I have nothing against Cathcart," Beale reasoned as he sat with the crumpled newspaper in his hand. "But he has more money than he can ever live to use—millions of it. I wired his Park Avenue place. I know every burglar alarm and trap in the house. I installed the system in his strong-room and hidden vault off the library. There is sure to be some cash there, and probably some valuable jewels. If I rob this rich man he'll never miss it, and the noise that it 'll stir up will hurt Jones."

Edward Beale closed his eyes and visualized the big library in the Cathcart mansion. He saw in fancy the five-ton marble fireplace; the soft hangings of maroon-colored silk; the long rows of priceless volumes, tooled and gilded by master craftsmen. He saw again the cleverly let-in panel behind a carved screen—the panel electrically protected which was the first barrier to the little strong-room beyond. Inside was a door of laminated steel, fire-proof and as burglar-proof as any safe of the day. And then—

Beale smiled and opened his eyes. The after-sunset chill was in the air. He had many errands, now his mind was made up, and haste was necessary before the Cathcart residence should be turned over to the uses of the sick and wounded from abroad.

Slowly and thoughtfully the Vermonter retraced his steps and boarded the cars. Three hours later found him in Philadelphia, bargaining with a stationer whose card in the window read:

PRINTING DONE ON THE PREMISES.

To the stationer Beale represented himself as being in the bicycle-repair line. He needed some business cards and a few note-heads in a hurry. He paid cash in advance, and by noon of the next day was in possession of some showy business cards purporting that one "John K. Adamson" sold motor-cycles and conducted a repair establishment at a certain address on South Sixth Street.

South Sixth Street never knew an Adam-

son who welded broken bicycle-frames and sold tires, but the next day a Baltimore manufacturer of oxyacetylene torches and cylinders of the compressed gases took pleasure in booking "Adamson's" order for a small trial outfit, and expressed the hope soon to interest him in a larger apparatus.

The cylinders fitted rather snugly in the bottom half of a moderate-sized extension case. The torch and twin tubes took up little additional room. Adamson packed the case with care, added to its contents a telephone receiver and five hundred feet of No. 20 copper wire, weighing slightly more than a pound and a half.

Then, unobserved, he threw a package of business cards down a convenient sewer, and caught the first train for New York.

CHAPTER VII.

THE RETURN OF A GREEN FEDORA.

DUSK had fallen on the evening of the 17th of May, when Edward Beale approached a manhole on Park Avenue not far from the Cathcart place. His lank form was in overalls. A greasy cap was perched on his head, and his face was soot-smudged as if by a hard day's work. In one hand he bore a short ladder, in the other a lantern with the words "Edison Co. of N. Y." blown in the glass of the globe. A kit of tools in a canvas sack swung from his shoulder.

It took less than a minute to lift the lid of the manhole and tilt it against the curb. Now Beale lit the lantern and placed it as a warning. He lowered the ladder, and a few moments later was standing on the concrete floor seven feet below the street level.

A policeman strolled along, stopped, peered, then yawned and sauntered off, juggling his baton as policemen do when they are on duty and bored. Meanwhile Beale worked swiftly, a powerful electric torch thrust into a stirrup in the wall.

There were dozens of conduits, hundreds of wires, on the racks cleated before him, and he knew every one of them as a mother knows her children. In short order

he located the two wires he wanted, and carefully scraped the insulation from them. His next operation was a curious one. A layman observer, had there been one, might have thought Beale was telephoning, or at least listening-in to a conversation. For with a pair of wires hooked across the bare spots he had peeled, the expert was now bending over a little contrivance, a telephone receiver at his ear.

On a baseboard some eighteen inches long a scale was affixed, numbered and divided. And just over the scale a small copper wire ran from post to post. Attached to Beale's receiver, another wire terminated in a metal-pointed stylus. And this stylus was moving from point to point along the stretched wire, tapping gently and with precision as the operator listened carefully.

A fraction of an inch to the right, a hair to the left, and came the moment when Beale smiled. No sound came through the receiver. Again he tapped and listened intently to be sure of the point on the scale. All was satisfactory. He leaned over and read the mark on the scale.

"Three, point, one five, plus," he murmured, and busied himself with pencil and paper for a few seconds.

"Exactly three hundred and ten feet," he whispered softly.

Now he rummaged in the bag and produced several spools wound with fine wire. Three of these already measured and tested he connected, then from a loose coil he cut ten feet of similar wire and added that to the circuit. All was now ready for action. He climbed three rungs of the ladder and looked up and down the avenue, but no one in sight seemed to have the slightest interest in the open manhole.

Beale descended. With nimble fingers he spliced in the false circuit and concealed the wound spools behind an inner conduit. There followed some winding of tape, then came a *snip, snip*, as powerful clippers severed two wires.

Now the Vermonter made haste. He thrust his apparatus and tools back in the bag and pocketed his torch. He climbed out, drew up the ladder and covered the manhole. He blew out the lantern and

gathered up his outfit. And five minutes later he was ten blocks distant from the scene of his operations, minus ladder and lantern, but still shouldering the sack of tools.

No more could be done until the Cathcart servants were abed and asleep. There were at least four long hours to be killed.

Beale gained his room and peeled off his overalls. Article by article he then inspected the tools for the night's work and strapped the extension case. Then he threw himself on his bed and went over his plans.

There was little question but that all would be smooth sailing. He had learned earlier in the day that Gordon Cathcart and most of his servants were at Hempstead for the week-end. This simplified matters, for, knowing the mansion and its protecting and alarm devices as Beale did, an army of keen-eared servants was the only dangerous factor. With the master away, and with the mansion soon to be turned over to the Red Cross, what the strong-room would contain was problematical. In all likelihood there would be far from a fortune in it. There would at least be *some* cash. There would be bonds and valuable papers. There might be jewelry—family keepsakes that the old widower might like to have near at hand. In any event, there would be something worth while in the vault, and the news of its rifling and of the impotence of the Jones system would go far and wide.

The Vermonter picked up an evening paper. War news screamed at him from every page. He laid it down, too nervous to read. Time after time he glanced at his alarm clock, but it seemed as if the minute hand would never complete its circuit of the face.

Ten o'clock came, and the impatient man sprang to his feet. He brushed his hair and found his hat, musing that at least he could pass the following hour away by taking in a moving-picture show three blocks distant.

And by deciding thus, he made a grave mistake, for as he stood full in the light of the cashier's window and bought his ticket, a man wearing a green fedora peered

sharply at him and recognized the lost quarry of the Ahern Agency.

Ignorant of the fact that he had been seen by one of his former tailors, Edward Beale entered the theater and was ushered to a seat.

Later, three men found seats not far behind him, and when the lights flashed on between the feature reel and the ensuing "comic," there followed some whispering and inconspicuous pointing. A program hid the face of a person with a green fedora hat beneath him, and when the house became dark again he slipped away up the aisle and out of the theater.

The lost had been found—the "double-tail" clapped on again.

CHAPTER VIII.

A NOVEL CURRENT.

TO a man of Edward Beale's mechanical attainments the entry of the Cathcart premises was easy. A leisurely walk down the thoroughfare one block east brought him abreast of the place. He shifted the rather heavy extension case to the other hand, and with a glance behind him, proceeded on across-town to Park Avenue.

It was twenty minutes past one in the morning when he halted at the ornamental gate and put down the case. It was fairly dark, and no one was within sight. The third key Beale tried shifted the bolt, and without a warning squeak the gate swung inward and clicked almost noiselessly behind him. The grounds were far from extensive, and it was but a few paces to the *porte-cochère*. Here, the Vermonter recollected, sheltered from the view of the pavement, was a narrow, ventilating window, within easy reach of the artificial stone of the paving flags. The sliding sash was equipped with a "burglar trap," locally connected, but Beale smiled as he thought of the difficulties surmounting its violating.

Under the window he crouched and listened intently. The house was practically dark, but a faint light filtered through the stained glass over his head—a light originating from some source in the hall.

A scratching sound followed that could scarcely have been heard a dozen feet distant as a tested diamond-point bit a circle out of the window-pane. Beale fumbled in his suit-case and pressed something against the glass. A faint *scrunch* followed as the circle of glass gave way and dangled on its hinge of fly-paper. Then the thin fingers of the cracksman found the latch and the alarm connections.

Softly the window slid up and was lowered behind him. Beale picked up his kit and moved along the hallway. The way was plain now. It led back and up a broad staircase with carved balustrades, then along a passageway hung with priceless paintings and quilted with soft rugs that a Sultan of the Ottomans might have been glad to pray upon.

Beale knew his ground. There was a reception-room in front—a smoking-room and lounge leading off from it. Abreast of him at the head of the stairs an archway with double doors gave entrance to the music-room with its famous pipe-organ, especially designed and built for the Acid King. And in the rear lay the library—and the hidden vault.

Beale smiled as he avoided a velvet mat spread temptingly before the door of the library. He knew that beneath it was a cunning device which connected with a clock in the master's suite. He stepped over it, opened the door, and found himself in utter darkness.

His pocket torch now came into play. Masked until it showed but the merest ghost of a gleam, it served to show him his way to the mullioned windows in the eastern wall. He drew the curtains close. He pulled the heavy draperies across the silver rods until they lay flat. Not a ray of outside light penetrated the big chamber. Not a ray of light made inside could have been seen outside by any one.

Beale worked quickly and quietly. He dragged the carved screen from its place in front of the panel and draped it with a plush portière stripped from a doorway. He found another screen and arranged and draped it to suit him. Then, behind his barrier, he used a fuller light and bent to his work.

A clicking sound accompanied the swinging of the hinged panel, but the alarm system was as dead as the person who conceived it. It was but the brushing of the latch. Now Beale connected his cylinders and regulated the flow to the torch.

An intense greenish-blue flame leaped from the twin orifices and bit a circular score into the laminated steel of the vault door. A flickering circle of light played on the high-studded ceiling overhead and cast strange shadows beyond. Yet little sound escaped the barrier save a strident hissing of high pitch but small volume.

The last shred of metal yielded to the magic of the flame. Through smoked glasses Beale saw the combination knob waver like the wick of a dying candle. On the instant he seized it with a hand protected by an asbestos glove, and simultaneously switched aside the flame. A heavy piece of steel dangled in his hand and soon lay harmless on the stone hearth of the huge fireplace.

It was easy now. A hole eight inches across yawned in the face of the vault door. The edges cooled from a white heat to a dull red, and Beale thrust in his arm and fumbled at the bolts. They gave way, and the heavy door swung open.

There was an inner door, a fire barrier, unlocked. Beale turned the handle of this and opened it. Now he flashed his torch over pigeonholes stuffed with documents, looking for the cash and jewel compartment. He found it and pulled out the drawer.

A barely audible chuckle of satisfaction came from him as he seized a packet of bank-notes and noted the denomination of the corner of the topmost bill.

"There ought to be at least ten thousand in this," he said, stuffing it into his pocket.

It was all the money there was in sight. There were stock certificates and a thick sheaf of Liberty Loan bonds in view, but Beale ignored these, and was about to turn away when he saw a small morocco case in the far corner of the cash drawer. He opened this, and on a bed of faded green plush saw coiled an old-fashioned necklace. The stones were deep red and full of fire.

It was evidently a prized heirloom, this string of rubies. Beale snapped shut the case and thrust it in his pocket. Nothing remained to be done save to get away quietly and "clean."

There were few finger-prints left on the panel-casing or the tools, for Beale had "wiped" as he had gone along. For a few moments he worked diligently with an alcohol-saturated sponge. He ran this over the gas cylinders and torch handle, then spurned them and tossed away the sponge. His purchases had served their purpose, and the detectives were welcome to them when they should gather in the morning.

"Old Jones will be tickled when he sees the afternoon papers to-morrow," Beale chuckled as he felt his way along the wall and gained the door. Like a shadow he flitted down the hall and made his way to the head of the staircase.

And there he stiffened and flattened himself against the wall.

He saw nothing but the usual objects disclosed by the dim light which floated up from the hall below, but to his ears, alert and receptive, had come the buzz of human voices. For fully a minute he remained motionless, his senses strained, and then he tiptoed toward the avenue side of the house.

Outside the entrance of the large reception-room Beale halted and listened and fixed the source of the murmur which now came more plainly to him. There were men in the lounge-room—the smaller room—and they were discussing something.

Whether or not they had come in since his attack on the vault failed to concern Edward Beale at the moment. He peered within the larger room, found it unlit and untenanted, and entered it. He must know whether they were leaving soon, and get a line, if possible, on whether there were cars waiting at the *porte-cochère*. Close to the tapestried wall he felt his way and drew within sight and hearing.

"—a mighty fine thing, indeed, Mr. Cathcart," some one with a deep authoritative voice was saying. "The wounded from Seicheprey have been evacuated gradually, and some of the permanently crippled may be embarked soon. It's easier

and more economical to get them back here to convalesce, and you can count on a houseful by the time you get things ready. And they'll be mighty lucky boys to have a—"

A deprecatory grunt interrupted the speaker. "General," an age-cracked voice went on, "I'm sorry I didn't think of this long ago. I haven't done half enough. They play me up in the papers as the philanthropist and the friend of man. Because I founded a hospital and started a camp or two for poor little tykes that didn't know what fresh air or a good meal was, I've been canonized and held up as a paragon. And all these years I've been making nitralene at six cents a pound and selling it for a dollar thirty. I've never given away my income before—let alone what I've piled up. According to my light I've been a thief—a thief beyond the pale of the law. For I've taken all I could get—without making due return."

A laugh followed this statement—a blending of more than two voices raised in merriment. Edward Beale edged closer, and from his shelter in the clinging folds of a portière, surveyed the room beyond. He recognized the wrinkled face of Gordon Cathcart, who sat facing him. And there was something familiar about the features of the khaki-clad man with stern eyes and closely cropped beard of iron-gray who sat beside the Acid King. Two other men in olive-drab sat with their backs toward the watcher. Now Cathcart continued:

"You may laugh, gentlemen, but it's only recently that I've learned the meaning of the word 'charity.' I've never been charitable. I've given but the crumbs from my table. True charity consists in giving up some personal luxury or necessity for the benefit of the other fellow. And now charity and duty are synonymous; this terrible war has opened all our eyes. You all have made your sacrifices. I know that you, doctor, have given up a practise that meant at least fifty thousand a year—"

"It was a pleasure to tender my services," one of the men facing away from Beale broke in.

"And you, general," Cathcart continued, "gave up the best-paying construction

business in the country to take over the brigade of engineers. You—"

"And we can thank you for equipping the 403rd," said the man with the gray beard. "When do you think you can sail, Craig?"

Edward Beale's heart gave a leap at the name, and a familiar voice came to him as one of the men with his back toward him spoke up:

"Hope to get away Wednesday. We've had an awful time scraping up men for some of the technical berths. We're still shy a couple of master electricians. It seems the signal corps scoured the country and grabbed everything in sight—God bless 'em!"

"If I was a bit younger I'd be with you," Cathcart said regretfully. He smiled as he thought of something, then resumed: "My man, Gately, he's fifty-five if he's a day. He was born in London—as you probably know by his accent—and he's all broken up because the British Recruiting Mission won't take him. And, by the way, he's the only servant I'll have left after next week."

Beale saw the uniformed men stare at the speaker, but the latter was quick to explain.

"It's this way," he said. "I've got probably ten years more to live at the outside. I haven't got a soul in the world related to me. My wife's gone ahead. My daughter's gone. And the last to go was my nephew. I've closed out my Hempstead property and taken Liberty Bonds for a sinking fund for the hospital. Practically every dollar I have in the world has been pledged to various charities, and this house itself has been deeded over to the Red Cross in perpetuity. I may have enough cash to pay Gately's wages for a few years, and I have a little ten-acre farm down in the Delaware peach country. And that's where Gately and I are going to putter around and keep house. I'm what you might call a poor man to-night. Beyond a necklace of ruby doublets that was my first gift to my wife, I don't own even a blessed jewel. In fact, like a good thief, I've given 'the substance of my house.'"

Edward Beale's ears tingled. The neck-

lace in his pocket became a ton in weight. Now he listened, ashamed, as the Acid King continued:

"It's curious how I stumbled on to that passage a few weeks ago. I was thumbing over the Bible, and the words seemed to leap up at me. They run: 'Men do not despise a thief if he steal to satisfy his soul when he is hungry; but if he be found, he shall restore sevenfold; he shall give all the substance of his house.' And since reading that, gentlemen, I've tried to live up to it; and I think each one of *you* are."

An impressive silence followed, broken at length by the officer who had been addressed "doctor."

"I think you're right, old friend," he said. "There's nothing too dear for us to sacrifice. The army 'over there' is small yet, but even so our losses to date amount to a grand total of 5,883. And when we have two or three million in the field—"

Edward Beale waited to hear no more. Blindly, almost carelessly, he felt his way back along the dark hall and into the library. And there by the ruined vault he stood rigid and thoughtful.

And now it came to him that revenge was far from sweet—that for years he had been living selfishly and in error. His plan to live straight was the best after all, but even that plan fell short of his duty. War had been to him while in prison something impersonal, indefinite — something far away. The prison had been a world complete in itself: boasting its own "society," its wing of "politicians," its own paper. Daily papers from "outside" were *verboten*, and as far as the war was concerned it might have been likened to a famine in China, or the cholera raging in India.

These men who had given their all—these men who sat in the room yonder with neither liquor nor cigars for cheer—had opened the eyes of the lank Vermonter to his obvious duty. They had given the substance of their house. And he, a New Englander born within trumpet-sound of a cavalry post, could do no less.

For the moment he was a boy again, and the trumpeters were blowing the "reveille." He saw the troop guidons fluttering in the wind, the horses snapping playfully at one

another, while cavorting around the frosty-railed corrals. Each note of the reveille came to Edward Beale as plainly as if blown by a trumpeter in the room; and as the final bar died away his soul awoke.

There was yet time and opportunity to live and die like a man.

He took out the jewel-case and sheaf of bank-notes and replaced them in the drawer. Regretfully he eyed the havoc he had wrought, and was about to snap out the light of his torch when a thought came to him. He placed the light in a position convenient, and scribbled a few words upon a sheet of paper. The point of the pencil broke short off under his nervous pressure, but he plucked a fountain pen from his pocket and finished the message. He ripped the sheet from the pad, folded it once across and thrust it conspicuously into a crevice near the hole he had cut.

Caution and a clean getaway were now Beale's watchwords. He crept along the corridor and passed noiselessly down the great staircase. He breathed easier as he approached the window behind the *portecochère*; but as he was about to raise the sash a shadow fell across the semitransparent pane. Some one was passing between the window and the reflected light from the avenue.

Thinking it might be a chauffeur waiting for the officers above, Beale looked through the hole he had cut a half an hour earlier. And as he looked and grasped the situation his heart skipped several beats and a chill crept up his spine.

For two policemen stood less than ten yards distant, the light glinting dully on their drawn and ready weapons.

And even as Beale was sensing the fact that the house was surrounded, that he was lost, came the thud of feet on the front walk and the soft ringing of a door-bell.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SUBSTANCE OF HIS HOUSE.

TWICE for periods of several seconds the bell sounded, and Beale, horror-stricken at his plight, stepped into the deeper shadows. A flight of stairs lead-

ing to the nether regions was not far away from him, and as he heard slippered feet beginning the ascent of these, he crept along the wall, and like a creature at bay, climbed the rear staircase.

All too plainly he heard the front door swing open on its chain, a challenge, and a gruff explanation. And then the servant, breathing hurriedly, flew up the front stairs and burst in upon his master.

"There's parties at the door, sir," Beale heard him gasp, "as say they're detectives. The 'ouse is surrounded by police, sir. They say there's a burglar on the premises—been in 'ere at work for full thirty—"

"Bosh!" snapped Gordon Cathcart, "there's no burglar in the house. Brace up, Gately. You know every door and window is protected."

To Beale's ears there came the significant *click* of a weapon being cocked. "Shall I let the parties in, sir?" the servant asked.

That question was never answered by Gordon Cathcart, for it occurred to Beale that his game was up. "Yes," he said, answering for the master, "let 'em in. I surrender." Firmly he walked forward.

"Good Lord! If it isn't Beale!" declared Colonel Craig as the hall became flooded with light. "I've been looking for you high and low for the last ten days."

As the others stood gaping and Beale seemingly failed to grasp the significance of the colonel's statement, there came a thumping on the chained door. "Tell 'em to go away!" thundered Craig. He drew nearer the wondering Vermonter and repeated: "I've been looking everywhere for you."

"But I'm the burglar," Beale faltered. "I broke in here after queering the alarm system. I've ruined the vault—and I'm caught dead to rights."

Gordon Cathcart slipped away, but soon returned with a sheet of paper in his hand. Beale recognized his message. He bit his lip while the officers stared at him. Then Cathcart read aloud:

"I'm sorry I spoiled your vault. I put back the jewels and money. I overheard your talk, and am going away to live honestly and give all the substance of my house."

"Did you write that *before* or *after* you knew the police were around the house?" snapped the general.

Colonel Craig answered for the culprit. "It's written in ink," he said after a glance. "And the ink has been dry some time. I know something about this man. He's been more sinned against than otherwise. He's the inventor of that synchronous receiver just adopted by the signal corps. I've been looking for him, and I'll be damned proud to have him in my regiment and make a sergeant out of him."

Glances were exchanged. "What did you mean," the general asked, "by writing that about giving the substance of your house?"

"I was going to try to enlist for the front," Edward Beale answered. Thoughtfully and proudly he added: "I expressed the model down to Wing & Croy some time ago from Elizabeth. I didn't think of it in connection with signal-corps work at the time, but I'm glad the government thinks well of it. They're welcome to it."

Colonel Craig whispered something in the general's ear. He in turn spoke in a low tone to Gordon Cathcart. The latter nodded, whereupon the general ordered:

"Dr. Quarrier: Examine this recruit! Colonel Craig, swear him in!"

"How are you physically?" the doctor asked as he thumped the astonished recruit on the chest in friendly fashion, then went on to feel of his biceps.

"Lean but tough, sir," Beale replied.

"Vision?"

"Perfect, sir; as far as I know."

"Hold up your right hand!" snapped Colonel Craig, and with a celerity truly astounding, administered the oath.

"You can let those detectives in now," the general advised the wondering Gately.

And as the servant headed down the stairs, Colonel Craig turned to Beale. "By the way," he said, "you never told me how to beat the Jones system."

"The police 'll find the answer in a man-hole," Beale answered soberly. "It's simply a case of measuring the ohms of resistance with a slide-wire adaptation of the Wheatstone bridge. Then wire spools to the same resistance and shunt the current off to the false circuit."

Came the rush of feet and three men bore up on the little group. "That's Beale," one of them declared; "that's the burglar."

"What do you mean, 'burglar'?" the general demanded, laying a detaining hand on the coat-sleeve of the Ahern Agency man.

"I mean what I say," the detective blustered a little uncertainly. "This man is an expert—"

"—electrician," Colonel Craig added for him, "and has just been promoted to a sergeantcy in the 403rd Engineers."

"And he's just demonstrated to my satisfaction the weakness of my burglar alarm system," Gordon Cathcart volunteered. "And if you gentlemen will go below," he added, "my man will serve you with a bottle of beer and show you the way out."

(The end.)

U U U U

HER MIRROR

BY CLIFFORD TREMBLY

IMPRISONED in a bit of glass,
Framed by a silver band,
Her glowing face laughs back to me,
Who close beside her stand.

Pray, hold it thus, my dainty maid;
'Tis double joy to me;
I love you so, one's not enough—
Now two of you I see!

Star Thirteen

by Herman
Howard
Matteson



"YOU just can't dodge your bounden duty, Kwalal," declared the girl. "You might think you've jettisoned your cargo; you're sailin' on light and happy, when here Fate heaves you to, and loads this here responsibility back onto you, and more along with it. We got each a burden, and we got to pack it. Mine—it does seem grievous heavy at times, but—"

He stood before the girl, running his fingers nervously about the brim of his rubber sou'wester hat. "It don't seem right, Edie," he protested. "You hain't got but one life—you ought to live it. The years, they roll on—they never roll back. I—"

The thin, querulous voice of an old man called petulantly from the adjoining room, and the girl hurried through the door, presently to return. "Dad's bad," she said. "I got to send for the doctor to look in again. It don't do no good, the doctor comin' don't; just costs fifteen dollars. But dad wants him. Will you row out when the packet-boat shows in the pass and send word, Kwalal?"

Kwalal nodded his head absently. "I hain't said yet entire what I aimed to say, Edie," he stammered, still twisting the hat and staring down at the floor. "I don't know how just to back into it neither. I—you—I was aimin' to say first that you

took things too serious on what you're owin' your father. Then I aimed to foller up by sayin' I and you was such good friends, clost friends, maybe now if I—if we was to get married—that might be a help. I don't know. What you think, Edie?"

For an instant the glad light that shone in her eyes would have betrayed to a glance keener than Kwalal's what she thought. But in a flash it passed, leaving the girl's pretty face desolate, resigned.

Reaching out she took the young man's thick hand into her own. "Kwalal, I don't want to hurt your feelings, but it's got to be—no. Kwalal—why Kwalal, stop to think, you hain't got a two-bit piece to rub against a dime. When you used to fish regular, you had money—some. Since you've got the fever of huntin' them sea bugs and speciments, why, Kwalal—you know it's so—you hain't made salt."

"I sold five hundred dollars' worth of them Pectines to a collector," he replied with a suspicion of heat, "and when 'once I find the big one—"

"Two years ago you sold 'em," she broke in. "Since you hain't sold a nickel's worth. And Kwalal, I don't aim to hurt you, but it hain't a man's lay to prowl the beaches, pawin' over seaweed and crawlin' critters, hopin'—hopin' always you'll find

the big one. Course you love it, but you don't turn it to nothin'. Look, when you found out what was killin' the Guemes Island lobsters—you never got a penny. You locate a salmon run for Jennings—not a penny for Kwalal. And you ask me to marry you, Kwalal. Boy, think—I got dad to look after. You know, he hain't had a easy day, a easy hour, since—since that night. I can't go work anywhere, I got to stay with him. We've sold off the farm, a patch at a time, to Tsolepat, till they hain't much left to sell. When it's all gone—but I dassent land till the dock's in sight. I don't know what then."

Kwalal's kindly, boyish face bore an ugly snarl. "You mention Tsolepat—he hain't in no way the reason for your sayin' me no, is he? Tsolepat. The Siwash Indians names him good, 'Tsolepat, that pouches his money.' Has he—"

"No, no. Tsolepat—*him* ever speak a woman serious? Tsolepat, he says, no one can afford a woman that hain't rich, women's fixin's cost so much. No, no. Tsolepat—why he hardly ever talks to me. He talks to dad. And I don't know why, but what he says to dad goes. Tsolepat, no, no! You don't like him; I don't. But he is a worker; he's got money; he's got land, most of ours by now. It's like the Bible says, seems like: 'him that has, gets.'"

"Don't slur the Good Book by quotin' it at such cattle," answered the young man testily. "The Indians got a sayin' hits him better. 'the rottener the tree, the thicker the moss.' There's honest hustlin', Edie, I know, and there's selfish schemin' that takes, takes, grabs, but never gives, that makes men like Tsolepat rich. It hain't just work, brains, 'savin', that gets them on; it's something gone from a man's breast that lets him take advantage of somebody's tough luck and not hate hisself for doin' it. It's plumb selfishness—"

Suddenly he stopped speaking; his eyes shifted guiltily.

"I might as well be goin', Edie. It just comes to me now; it hits me plumb between the eyes. Here I rant about Tsolepat. And I'm worse selfisher than he ever was. Instead of layin' up a livin' for a woman, I

prowl the beach because I like to. I come here askin' you to marry me just like I'm a bird, and you're a bird, and all I got to do is climb a twig and twitter. Why, birds can turn to and build a nest, but birds hain't got sick fathers, and birds hain't fool sea-bug hunters. No. Good-by, Edie."

Abruptly he turned from the door, walked dejectedly toward his cabin, a tumbled affair of driftwood situated on the island beach half a mile distant. As he walked, he turned over and over in his mind what Edie had said to him. Beneath the tan his cheeks began to burn as complete consciousness of his utter selfishness, worthlessness, helplessness came over him.

Formerly he had been a fisherman. Then, hired by a scientist to row him about in search of marine specimens, Kwalal had got the fever. At once he had relinquished fishing, had taken to combing the shores of the myriad islands of far lower Puget Sound, thus acquiring his sobriquet, "Kwalal," "the bug hunter."

His wants were few. A bit of meal in the barrel, coffee in the tin, and he could live; for always there were deer in the wood, salmon in the bay.

When Kwalal had first been seized with the collecting mania, Edie's father had been prosperous; suspiciously so as may be gathered from the significance of his Siwash nickname—nearly every one worth while in the San Juan Islands has his alias—"Laklie," "the man who works in the dark." Following a rumored raid on a salmon trap, Laklie had taken to his bed, had never been aught since but a helpless cripple. Further rumor said that Laklie carried in his body a bullet received in exchange for a bullet that had snuffed out the life of the trap watchman.

Of this unfortunate affair of the fish-trap, Tsolepat either knew, or pretended to know, an advantage which he was not slow to seize. At figures ridiculously low the fearful Laklie had sold to Tsolepat a ten acres, a second ten, a third, and now, on the day before, a fourth ten, comprising the stretch of meadow through which flowed a sparkling brook almost to Laklie's door, thence into the bay beyond.

All this, seeking some balm for his

wounded pride Kwalal bitterly reviewed as he walked on toward his cabin in the gathering darkness. But in the speculations of Edie's father, the greed of the voracious Tsolepat, Kwalal found comfort not at all. The facts remained, cold, staring facts, that he, Kwalal, was worthless, shiftless, selfish; in short, a beach-combing hunter of bugs.

Entering the cabin he came to a stop, stared in the half light at the white sheets of paper ranged along the wall bearing the beautiful, fairy forests of brown algae, green cryptograms and the gorgeous red lessonia. Foolishness, all foolishness; play for women. Upon a shelf were ranged twelve star-fish, the echinoderms of Puget Sound. Once more he counted them, as he had done scores of time—twelve.

"If I only knowed," he said half aloud, "if I only knowed where the thirteenth star could be found—"

Kwalal lighted the small kerosene lamp and searched forth from the drawer of a home-made bureau a worn and tattered letter bearing the name of a famous biologist of the Middle West.

DEAR SIR:

Professor James, who visited the San Juan Islands a year ago, reports that you have a perfect series of twelve Puget Sound echinoderms. There should be, and is, somewhere in these waters a thirteenth star, the rare and all but extinct "radiata." Procure me a radiata, a perfect specimen, making your collection complete, and I will give you ten thousand dollars for it.

Kwalal tossed the letter back into the drawer. That thirteenth star had contrived to make of him a fool, a selfish, maundering fool. It had kept him from a man's work; it had won him the disdain of the girl he loved.

"Why," he communed, "just now, if I'd 'a' kept a fishin', I could 'a' walked up to Edie manlike, and said, 'Edie, here, you hain't got no call to worry. Send the dad to the hospital. Sure. Here, Edie, I got the *pil chickamin'*, and I could 'a' reached down in my pants-pocket and fetched out a bundle, and I could 'a' handed it over. Yes.'"

Truculently Kwalal turned and glared at the twelve stars. "That's what I could 'a' done if I'd kept fishin'. Now I hain't

got thirteen. I hain't got even Edie's good will, respect—nothin'. And I don't deserve nothin'. I say I don't. And I know. Why, I hain't more than half hunted for this thirteen. No, I hain't. I've lollygagged along, admirin' seaweed, putterin', foolin'. I hain't never worked the deep night tides. No. I've just set in Edie's kitchen dreamin', telling Edie what wonders I'll do when I turns up this radiata. That's what I've done. Mudhead!"

He reached toward the shelf, took down the delicate rose star, made as if to crush it in his fingers and threw it back upon the shelf. "Thirteen," he apostrophized, "you're either dumcussed awful lucky, or dumcussed awful unlucky. And lookee here, you made a fool of me. Now you know what I'm goin' to do? You got the idee that I've gave up? Now you, Edie, Tsolepat, everybody, you line up on the wharf stringer, and take a observation as I warp by. From now I got no night, no day. Looke, thirteen. I find you, or I sag down into a kelp bed somewheres, and there permanent I stay. Yes."

With a final shake of his fist which comprehended the seaweed upon the wall, the twelve stars upon the shelf and the epistle resting in the bureau drawer, Kwalal gathered up his collecting basket, his long-handled rake, and in the darkness made for the beach where he shoved off his dory and rowed slowly toward the shallow bay before Edie's cabin.

As he rowed on, profound cogitations possessed him.

"Seems like I've hunted for thirteen everywhere. Let's see. Now I never projected none in front of Edie's. But what's the use? That's a mud flat; only clams and the like work on a mud flat. Still, one might work up from deep water; that's where thirteen will come from, the perfesser thinks, if we ever do find him. I'll have a look. Sure. Natural, now, when I do find thirteen, it's goin' to be somewhere I hain't looked before. Now there's something, lollygaggin' about like I done, that I never thought of before. Mudhead!"

Kwalal lighted the bug which he drew from beneath a thwart. For the sake of the unenlightened be it known that a

"bug" is a five-pound lard pail with a candle thrust through a snug hole in the side, and supported by the handle transferred from its proper place to a hold upon the brim and the flange of the bottom. No wind will blow out a bug. The bright tin sides and bottom of the pail reflect and amplify the light, making it admirable for out-of-door use at night.

Occasionally, as Kwalal worked his dory gradually toward deeper water, his rake would encounter dead clam-shells, roots of kelp-plant and the like, the practised, familiar feel of his hands detecting at once that the "take" of the iron teeth was useless to his purpose. Finally, in a place where the water was waist deep, his rake struck something "live" as he could tell from the sound, the nature of the vibration that communicated itself through the handle. He drew it up, washed it off, held it to the light. Feverishly he began clawing about in the mud, drew in the rake again and again, and filled the basket.

On hands and knees in the bottom of the dory, he gloated over his find. "I swear! I swear! Who'd ever 'a' thought it?"

He picked up a specimen, turned it this way and that against the light. "I swear! Oysters, big, fat oysters—a natural bed—layin' here all the time in Edie's front yard. And I never found 'em, because I thought it wasn't no use to look in mud for thirteen. I swear!"

He turned his dory, rowed frantically to the beach before his house, ran up the trail and dashed a pailful of fresh water over the treasure. Within the cabin, he opened a shell or two at random, examined the meats, the thickness and texture of the shells—details that his bug-hunting knowledge told him were important.

Oysters! A bed of fine native oysters! A find indeed! And that the flat upon which the bed was located belonged in part to Laklie, a greater part to Tsolepat, mattered not at all. He, Kwalal, penniless hunter of sea bugs, could stake out ten acres, hold it for a period of five years, and all the profit therefrom was his. A fortune! Why, seed oysters brought a dollar and a quarter a sack, and that bed, running without a doubt into deeper water,

would supply seed oysters by the hundred sacks, thousands. Rich, he was *rich*!

Kwalal turned, glanced at the reflection of himself in the cracked mirror and bowed ceremoniously. Now what would people say? Would it be longer the nudge, the sneering whisper, "Kwalal—crazy bug-hunter—broke—never does a man's work—asks a girl to marry him to keep him?" Not muchee it wouldn't. Now folks would say (here Kwalal placed his hand upon his bosom, bowed low to the plaudits of the multitude) folks would say: "Kwalal—eminent scientist—man of great learning. Indeed we're all proud of Kwalal—we knew he'd hit it—never a doubt—rich, yes, he's very rich—oyster king—ah, yes."

At the pleasant picture thus conjured up by this nimble play of fancy, Kwalal grinned. The thirteenth star—what mattered it whether he, whether anybody ever found it?

Then suddenly, at memory of the scathe that he had suffered from Edie's frank tongue, the complacent smirk faded from his leathern face. Edie had declared it no man's work to prowl the beaches. To disprove this slur upon his chosen vocation, to make good, find thirteen, rehabilitate himself in Edie's regard, but more especially in his own, Kwalal had sworn to himself before the shine of his heart of hearts that he would do or die.

"Maybe now," communed Kwalal solemnly, "this here is just luck's way of makin' a fool out of me. 'We'll let Kwalal find them oysters,' says luck, like as not, to itself. 'Kwalal will forget all about thirteen, and he'll lay down, he won't try to find it, and he'll get fat and lazy, and all the time folks is kotowin' to him like they always do when a party's got money, I, Old Man Luck, will be laughin' fit to bust because I'll know, I and Kwalal, that Kwalal tried something and fell down, that Kwalal is a false alarm, that Kwalal is just like Jeff Moore's dog that started a coon, got lost, and set in the wood all night barkin' at a knot. That's Kwalal,' says Old Man Luck."

The bug hunter jerked his head in the direction of the shelf of star fish. "That's Kwalal," says Old Man Luck.

Kwalal packed the oysters back into his basket, walked to the beach, shoved off his dory and rowed away into the darkness.

The hour was well after daylight when his craft appeared around the point and beached itself before Edie's door, before which the girl was standing. As Kwalal approached, she pointed wearily toward the corner of the lot. Where had been the noisy, bustling brook of clear, cold water, was a muddy gully. Tsolepat, the instant that he had acquired ownership to the ten acres through which the stream passed, had felled a fir-tree, dug a ditch and diverted the stream so that now it flowed down a draw past his barn and emptied into the bay through a cañon half a mile distant.

"It's just an added trouble," said Edie resignedly. "I'll have to pack water from the spring on the hill."

Kwalal seized the two big, galvanized iron buckets from the shelf beside the kitchen door and rushed up the hill, the water slopping over the brims as he hurried back.

A large power-boat had put into the bay, had come to anchor. A man was coming ashore in a dingey. Up the trail walked the man, calling out and waving his hand as he advanced.

"I've got good news for a good-looking girl," he said with familiar gallantry. "One of the best, natural oyster beds in Puget Sound lies here in your front yard."

"Oysters!" exclaimed Kwalal. "In that flat!"

The fish commissioner deputy gave Kwalal a knowing grin. "Oysters, yes. You're some bug hunter, Kwalal, paddle over that flat a million times." The deputy turned to Edie. "You're sort of man of the house, I understand, so I'm going to stake out the legal ten acres in your name."

The girl stared blankly.

"I mean it, young lady. Here, sign there. Then we'll stake off the ten acres. Under the law, that ten acres is yours, for five years, and the take therefrom. It'll make you rich."

"Oysters?" demanded Kwalal, his face seaming and wrinkling like some placid pool blown upon suddenly by a sportive gale. "I swear!"

Edie couldn't believe it yet. While the deputy was staking the corners of the flat with long poles driven into the mud, she put out in an old, leaky skiff and scraped up a bucketful of oysters with a hoe. Oysters, without a doubt, oysters! When she returned to the beach, Kwalal had disappeared.

"Dad," she said, walking in beside the cripple's bed, "we're rich; look here!"

The old man looked and began to cry.

Then shortly, very shortly indeed, came Tsolepat, who had seen a power-boat in the offing, men driving stakes in his property. Edie broke the news. Tsolepat's lips fluttered like the gills of a dying fish. Of course, it being part his land, he had a claim, a share.

Edie handed over the paper-bound volume of the fisheries laws given her by the deputy. For a wonder, Tsolepat had no claim, no share; indubitably the oyster bed was hers, hers alone for five years. Neighbor Tsolepat departed.

Within the week Edie had sold five hundred sacks of seed oysters to the Samish Bay Company for a dollar and a quarter a sack. They were rich, she and old Laklie. Now that Laklie could have a doctor when he desired, he neither wanted nor needed one. Edie bought a new dress, curtains for the front windows, a what-not for the corner; Laklie smoked better tobacco, had the packet-boat put him off a paper to read every day.

Edie didn't think it possible, but Kwalal must have been jealous, envious, for he came not at all to gaze upon the splendors of their new estate. Now and then Edie saw his dory creeping along the shore, caught the flash of the bug at night as he hunted; hunted for that fool thirteenth star.

Why didn't he come? Things were different now. It was all right, now, for Kwalal to hunt bugs if he so desired. It wasn't exactly man's work, to be sure, but he might be doing worse. She had plenty now, for all. Her face, as she peered through the new curtains, burned with hurt, indignant pride.

Another batch of seed oysters Edie sold, and still another. She had contracted to sell a fourth; the tug had warped in with a

scow alongside, men on board armed with dredge rakes. Edie, watching them as they prepared to dredge, turned to her housework. A man came ashore in the work-boat.

"I hain't the bearer of no glad tidings," he said bluntly; "your oyster bed is a goner. Might as well tip over them stakes and forget it."

The girl's lower jaw hung pendulous. "Oyster bed a goner! What?"

"Yeah. Star-fish. One big star will eat a oyster a day, and drive a thousand more down into deep mud where they hain't no good even if you get 'em. Mud flavor is no go on oysters; folks likes ketchup better. Too bad."

"Why—how— Can't a body do anything?"

"I don't know of nothing. Look. I fetched up a star for you to see."

He held out a five-pointed star, its middle portion bulging with the oyster that it had ingested, shell and all.

Star-fish—her ruination as it had been cause of Kwalal's!

"Well," she said, sighing resignedly, "if they're gone, they're gone. I suppose I oughtn't to complain, but be thankful for just a few weeks of glory. Star-fish."

The days passed, the weeks; still Kwalal came not, but stuck to his dory and the long-handled rake, which in daylight and in darkness he plied indefatigably along the island shores.

Not for long was Edie able to keep from her father the dire news of the oyster bed's failure. Then, in response to some extravagant demand of his, she told him. The old man had been doing very well navigating the cabin's narrow floor upon a pair of crutches fashioned for him by Kwalal some months before. Now he threw the crutches aside and took to his bed.

Came the doctor who shook his head, pocketed his fifteen dollars and departed. Laklie grew worse, resigned himself to die. A second doctor was called in from Bellingham way whose fee was thrice fifteen dollars. He, too, shook his head. Laklie was going to die. By the advice of an officious neighbor Edie sent for an expensive electrical apparatus, paying therefor her last dollar. Steadily her father failed. Tsolepat, like

a buzzard hovering over a fen that shelters the wounded deer, circled about, walked the beach before the house, prowled along the line fence, came finally to the door.

Laklie, believing his hours were numbered, threw off the mask of submission and drove the neighbor from him with curses.

Tsolepat, white with anger, paused in the kitchen. "Edie, your dad has gone plumb *pelton* crazy. You hear what he said to me? He'd better die now, he'd better."

Laklie did not die.

Again Tsolepat came. Laklie was his former cringing, submissive self. Behind closed door he and Tsolepat whispered, then the old man, in a voice that quavered, called Edie.

"Tsolepat's got a proposition, Edie, and I think that we should ought to take it."

Tsolepat, licking his dry lips, drew a paper from his pocket. "I just got your welfare in mind, Edie," he said unctuously, "yours and Laklie's. You can't make a go of this place, now the oyster bed's gone. It won't never be no good again. They say—I say, the oyster bed's gone. This here is the proposition: I take over the farm, what's left, and the oyster bed, not that it's any good, just to keep bug huntin' lunatics offen it— I take 'em over, and I bind myself to keep Laklie long as he lives, him and you, too. Hain't that generous enough?"

Tsolepat looked up at Edie, who stood staring at the floor. "That's what I call generous, Edie. They hain't no one takin' a chance but me. But I'm willin'; we been neighbors here a long time.

"They's another thing, Edie, and it's hard to get to. I hain't much on flowery talk. I done well of late, crops good, so forth. Figgerin' all circumstances, for'ards and back, I kind of think it might be convenient under this plan for I and you to marry. It'd save—"

Laklie nodded his head. "That would be best, Edie. Tsolepat 'd keep you good."

"All right," Edie said wearily.

With the deftness of a prestidigitator Tsolepat whisked the paper into one of Laklie's hands, a dipped pen into the other. "Sign there, Laklie. The property is yourn; Edie can sign as witness."

Obediently Edie complied.

"We'll go to Bellingham, Edie, I and you," said Tsolepat, brightening and looking about him benevolently, "and get married. We'll go on the packet-boat. They's a seine-boat comin' back; we'll take it, save fare, and hotel bill."

"All right," Edie agreed, and stood looking blankly from Tsolepat to her father. Then, as a loud halloo sounded from the beach, and the thud of running footsteps, she uttered a whimpering cry and started blindly toward the kitchen.

In the door burst Kwalal, mud to his shoulders, something clutched in one mud-smeared hand. Straight to Edie he ran, threw both dirty arms about her.

"I got her, Edie, I swear I got her—the thirteenth star! Lookee! Now, Edie, your old tusker-walrus of a dad can have medicine by the tub, a army of doctors. I—you, Edie—Hello, Tsolepat! Name your figger—for them slices of farm you got. Name your figger. Lookee! The thirteenth star! Ten thousand dollars. Name your figger!"

Tsolepat held up the paper. "The farm's mine now, and the oyster bed. Edie and I are goin' to marry."

Kwalal snatched the screed from Tsolepat's hand, ran his eyes swiftly over the lines. Twiddling the paper between his fingers, he looked at Edie and grinned amiably. "I swear, Edie, old thirteen come clost to playin' me low. What if I hadn't 'a' found it till to-morrow? Say—clost!"

Still grinning, he held up the paper, tore it in two, then in four. Tsolepat, howling madly, fell upon him, only to receive a smashing blow that piled him a huddled heap in the corner.

"Git up," ordered Kwalal, giving Tsolepat a thrust in the ribs with his foot. "Git up. Here's where I and you come to a bight, Tsolepat. I don't aim to hurt you if you don't get squallish. Now don't flare no false signal. You got nothin' on Laklie. A trap watchman was killed with a forty-four; the coroner told me so. Laklie never packed nothin' but a thirty-thirty in his life. At that you *might* get nasty, but you won't. No. Git up here and listen.

"You should ought to have studied bugs more, Tsolepat. If you had, you'd 'a'

knowed the five point hain't found no-wheres on this island but in the rock cove at the upper end of your land. Five points, Tsolepat, never move fifty yards from their spawn ground less they're carried. It was five points that et up Edie's oysters. I found two dead five points under the thwart of your dory, Tsolepat, where you over-looked 'em. And you hain't up on the fish laws, Tsolepat. To destroy, or cause to be destroyed any food fish in State waters is a gross misdemeanor, and draws a year in jail and a fine of a thousand dollars.

"But I'm goin' to be generous, Tsolepat. You done me a turn you never dreamed. You just sign back that last ten acres, turn the stream back into the old channel, and she's all hunky. You'll sign. Sure! Witness, Edie, and Laklie; he'll sign. Get out, Tsolepat! *Klatawal*!"

And Tsolepat "*klatawad*."

Edie looked on while Kwalal washed clean the precious thirteenth star. "Where you suppose I find him, Edie? In your oyster bed. Yes. It's a secret between I and you. Thirteen is a deep-water star, likes water the saltest. See where Tsolepat done me a favor? Turnin' off your brook, the shallows gets salter and salter, and up from the deep comes thirteen. See that, Edie? And listen: when the brook turns back, down to the deep will go every thirteen for good. I'm goin' to take three, no more; chances is no man in the world will ever find another. Get that idee, Edie?"

Suddenly the girl leaned toward him, plucked his wet sleeve. "Kwalal, did you—send the fish-boat?"

"Yeah. I didn't aim to have no oyster beleee me when I'd aimed to find thirteen, Edie. No. I aimed to find thirteen, make good, or tear out a clew and pile up derelict for good. And lookee, Edie; when the brook's turned back, all them five points will tear for deep water. Your oyster bed's as good as ever. I tell you, Edie, I found a lot of things a prowlin' the beaches bug huntin'. Why, Edie, I found *you* really; now didn't I?"

"Yes, Kwalal. But best of all, Kwalal, you found—yourself."

A moment the bug hunter pondered. "I swear now, Edie; maybe that's so!"

On the Night of the Storm

by Ray St. Vrain

CHAPTER I.

A BLACKMAIL EPIDEMIC.

YES, Mr. Vaughn would see Mr. Philip Orme at once.

Philip Orme, society man, rounder, haunter of the white lights, entered the famous detective's office. Towering tall and frankly stout, most of his height loomed in his legs, too much of his flesh was packed about the waist line. His face, which once might have been rather handsome, had become too disfigured with the unmistakable marks of dissipation to be longer regarded as good-looking—save perhaps by a certain type of foolish women who confound adventures on Broadway with exploits of heroism. But his tailor and haberdasher had done very well by him indeed, and his valet had completed their painstaking work. He was undeniably well dressed and well groomed. But he was not a man's man. He might have been a woman's man—once.

"Sit down, Mr. Orme," said Owen Vaughn, rising and taking one of the flabby hands. "What can I do for you?"

"A good deal, Mr. Vaughn—and you're just the man for the job." Orme seated himself carefully. His smile of greeting had faded; he frowned blackly; and the watery eyes would have blazed if they had had any fire left. "I'm sore. I'm sore clear through. That means I'm going to fight."

Vaughn leaned back in his swivel chair to study him at his ease. "What's the trouble, Mr. Orme?"

"Blackmail. Dirty blackmail. And all based on lies—nothing but lies."

"In which case, of course, the blackmailers got nothing?"

"Nothing? Do you call twenty-five thousand dollars nothing?"

"As much as that? And yet the charges were false?"

"Absolutely." Vaughn's steady, gray eyes were holding him. He shifted, then resorted to his smile again. "Here's the idea, Mr. Vaughn. You know the Ormes. We're all—well, thoroughbreds when it comes to enjoying life. I've had my little time—acted my little part in various tragicomedies. These blackmailers have patched up a lot of inconsequential lapses—slips—into one big story about one particular young woman, and with this they've bled me like leeches. Now I want to get 'em—and I've come to you." He took out his cigarette-case; Vaughn declined; Orme himself in a moment was inhaling vigorously. "Nerves shattered—damn 'em," he muttered. "Why can't they leave a man alone?"

"They," repeated Vaughn. "Why are they?"

"I want you to find out. But I've got my own suspicions—" He lowered his tones. "Do you know Peyton—Romney Peyton and Jim Scarborough?"

"Of Wall Street?"

"The same. Well, they're the men—I'm sure."

Vaughn smiled. "You're sure? Then why come to me?"

"Oh, there may be a doubt, of course. Nothing is proved till it's proved. But Peyton and Scarborough have motive enough for the dastardly business—that's something, isn't it?"

"Suppose, Mr. Orme, you tell me briefly what's happened."

A cigarette meant only twelve puffs to Philip Orme; he lighted another.

"Two months ago I received an anonymous letter postmarked here in New York ordering me to place ten thousand dollars in treasury notes in the hollow of a certain tree near my home in Kensington Park, Long Island. I did so. A month later I got a second letter in the same handwriting demanding fifteen thousand." He hesitated, puffing hard.

"And you put that in the tree, too?"

"Yes—the dogs! And only yesterday I received this." He handed Vaughn a piece of ordinary note-paper on which was written in a large, firm hand:

Be ready with another twenty-five thousand soon. Exact date later. We're glad you're not losing your appetite over paying out so much money—you're fat as ever.

"They thought that was a clever fling," muttered Orme, scowling.

Vaughn suppressed a chuckle. "Where are the other letters?"

Orme hesitated. "I—destroyed them."

"Indeed? That's unfortunate. Well, what are your reasons for suspecting Romney Peyton and Jim Scarborough?"

"The enmity goes back about a year to a certain transaction on the Street. While Peyton and Scarborough are not in partnership, yet they often do team manipulating. I beat them at their own game, 'bulled' Mid-Oklahoma Oil, unloaded on 'em—the bottom dropped—I cleaned some seventy or eighty thousand—cleverest thing, by Jove, I ever pulled off!" And Orme exploded with laughter.

"And you think these men are blackmailing you simply to get back the money they lost?"

"I do."

Vaughn shook his head. "Hardly, Mr. Orme. No business man would go after you like that." He smiled. "Anonymous letter—threats—hollow tree—why, it's the

regular old-fashioned way of going about it. Wall Street brokers would never resort to such clumsy methods to bleed you. The tree trunk sounds like a woman, or a very young man not yet out of his teens, or an ignorant foreigner. By the way, what did they threaten to do in case you failed to hand over the money?"

Orme flushed. "This is a rather delicate subject—"

Vaughn interrupted him sharply. "Why did you come to me? Do you fancy I'll take a case with half the facts withheld?"

The visitor acquiesced to the inevitable sullenly. "Well, there's a young lady who lives at Kensington Park—Miss Claire Trevor—to whom I've been paying attentions. The blackmailers threatened to go to Miss Trevor with their absurd story. She's a—h-m—a rather old-fashioned girl; carefully brought up; with out-of-date notions of right and wrong—a believer more of less in the single standard of virtue for both sexes; so—well, you can imagine my anxiety."

"I certainly can," was the dry response. "Now, briefly, what was the story?"

Orme hesitated again. Vaughn, thoroughly out of patience, glanced at his watch. The hint was taken.

"There was a young girl, a certain Katie—or Kathie—Shannon, who worked as a domestic in my Kensington Park house. She was a rather good-looking girl, rosy and all that; and one day she—like her kind—inveigled me into kissing her. Then she had me—or thought she had. She left my house vowing to 'get' me—"

"She told you this?"

"No; but I knew it was in her mind."

"Oh. Go on."

"She went to Peyton or Scarborough—or both—"

"Wait. Do you *know* this?"

"Certainly not. I'm simply putting two and two together." Vaughn nodded to him to proceed. "She had seen these men at my house and on one occasion had surprised us in an altercation. Naturally she thought they would aid her."

"Did she demand money of you before leaving your house?"

"No."

"And you think Peyton and Scarborough have given Katie Shannon the money they have already extorted from you?"

"I do."

"But you said a moment since these men wanted to recoup their losses in a certain stock transaction—"

"I meant," put in Orme hastily, moistening his lips, "that they had a *mixed* motive."

"I see." A faint smile passed over Vaughn's face. "Now, Mr. Orme, be good enough to let me see the first two black-mailing letters—"

"But I told you I had destroyed them."

"Come, come; you have them in your pocket."

"But—"

Vaughn shrugged wearily. "As you like. I refuse to take the case—"

Orme, frowning, reached into his inside coat pocket and brought out two letters which he handed to Vaughn without more ado. The detective scanned them hurriedly. They were short, couched in good English, and written in the same large hand as the note Orme had already shown him. No names were mentioned, not even Katie Shannon's. Orme's alleged relation with the housemaid was referred to delicately rather than otherwise, but the tone of the letters was sternly businesslike. Each ended with the significant query:

Would you like to have the young lady on whom you are forcing your attentions learn the facts?

"I'll keep these," said Vaughn, rising.

"But—" Under the look the detective flashed upon him Orme subsided and rose. "Take good care of them," he muttered. "That's all I ask."

"You're not a married man, Mr. Orme?"

Orme gave a slight start. "I'm divorced. The lady went out to Reno two years ago and charged me with something or other."

Vaughn put the letters into his safe. "I see. Just where is Kensington Park?"

"Near Grassmere—just a few minutes out on Long Island on the Pennsylvania Railroad. Are you coming out? If so, my car is at your service."

"Thank you; I shall decide later."

"You'll get busy on the case at once?"

Vaughn was rather non-committal. "I haven't decided to take the case yet, Mr. Orme. You'll hear from me in a day or so."

"I don't want to give up another twenty-five thousand," gasped Orme, beads of perspiration showing suddenly on his sloping brow, "and I don't want Miss Trevor to learn of their lies."

Vaughn smiled not unsympathetically. "I can well imagine your anxiety. The case is rather interesting, and—well, I'll let you know later. Good day, Mr. Orme."

Philip Orme looked as though he had a great deal more to say; but biting his lip, he turned abruptly and left.

After luncheon Owen Vaughn had another unexpected visitor—Mrs. Bettina Van Pruyn, the well-known society woman of New York, Palm Beach, and Kensington Park, widow of Derrick Van Pruyn, the last of the celebrated Dutch Van Pruyns, a family that had figured in the early history of Manhattan along with the Barclays and Van Cortlandts.

Mrs. Van Pruyn evinced distinct nervousness on entering Vaughn's private office. She was a rather voluble woman, and the detective considerably let her talk about the weather, the war, wheatless cookery, *et cetera*, while she composed herself sufficiently to state the business that had brought her.

She was a handsome, snowy-haired woman on the boundary between late youth and early middle age. The contrast between her white hair and still young-looking face was somewhat startling. Her features, while refined, indicated an unusual degree of emotionalism and weakness of character. She was dressed with taste and elegance. In a few moments she ceased her aimless chatter and came to the point.

"Mr. Vaughn, I have been told you are one of the cleverest detectives in New York—and, what appealed to me even more, that your trustworthiness and discretion are to be depended upon absolutely. You understand, of course, that everything I am about to say must be regarded as sacred?"

"Certainly, Mrs. Van Pruyn; that goes without saying."

She gave a last fidget, then burst out excitedly: "Mr. Vaughn, I have been cruelly, shamefully blackmailed! Twice I have had to take ten thousand dollars—twenty thousand in all—to a certain large boulder in a lonely corner of my estate; and now I am threatened again. Isn't this simply maddening? What am I to do?" Her pinkish, youthful face suddenly puckered; she lifted her lace handkerchief and burst into tears.

Vaughn let her weep in peace. Truth to tell, he was a bit staggered by her revelation. The case, or *cases*—how many of them would there be before he was through?—bade fair to be unusually interesting.

Mrs. Van Pruyn, like all women of her temperament, never wept long at a time. In a moment she was smiling like April sunshine through a drizzle.

"Here are the letters," she said simply, taking them from her hand-bag.

There were three, as in the case of Philip Orme. Vaughn studied them under a magnifying-glass. They were phrased in much the same way as those written to Orme. The chirography was different, yet on close examination looked to be but the other penmanship rather cleverly disguised. No names were mentioned, but each letter ended with a significant query as in Orme's:

"How would you like to have the man you love know your past?" The third letter served notice that another twenty thousand would be demanded soon.

"Have you discussed the matter with your lawyer, Mrs. Van Pruyn?" inquired Vaughn.

"Certainly not; my lawyers are personal friends—besides, they were very intimate with the late Mr. Van Pruyn. Naturally I decided to go to a stranger—one of course whom I could trust." She smiled wanly. "Maybe that only shows my woman's cowardice, but— Well, it's all so horrible, so humiliating— You understand, Mr. Vaughn?"

"Perfectly. Have you any suspicions as to the identity of the blackmailer?"

She blushed and lowered her gaze. "Not the slightest. It's all a mystery."

Vaughn paused to give her time. He flashed a glance at her; she was smiling rather vacantly again. He looked carelessly out of the window as he asked the next question:

"The letter refers to your past. Is there any particular incident?"

She gave a sharp little cry. "Oh, Mr. Vaughn, you're not going to—to ask me to prove myself some—well, some bad woman simply to help you on the case? I—" She seemed to feel her speech had been out of place, so forced a hollow little laugh. "It doesn't follow because I've allowed myself to be bled that the charges are true, does it?"

Vaughn's manner was delicately soothing. "Certainly not, my dear Mrs. Van Pruyn. A great deal of blackmail is not based on facts at all; and often those who are blackmailed meet the demands, not through fear their past lives will be exposed, but rather on account of dread lest the blackmailers, who usually are desperate people, may resort to violence. So—"

But Mrs. Van Pruyn did not let him finish. In her eager agreement with his view she leaned forward, patted him on the arm and burst into a glad little laugh. "Exactly, my dear Mr. Vaughn! What a wonderful knowledge of human nature you have. You hit off my own case exactly."

Vaughn smiled appreciatively. "Then there is nothing in your past life—no incident in itself perfectly innocent—that might have been misconstrued?"

Her lips went down. "Nothing."

She, like Orme, was not telling the truth—Vaughn was certain of it. However, he let the matter drop and took up another line of questioning.

"There is one other question I *must* ask, Mrs. Van Pruyn, if I am to take the case. The letter speaks of 'the man you love.' Pardon me, but do you happen to be particularly interested in some man friend at present?"

"Ye-es."

"Who is he?"

"Mr. Vaughn!" she cried irritably. "You said you'd ask only *one* question. This is the second—"

"This one proceeds naturally from the other—is part of it, in fact."

"I cannot answer it."

"Very well. I cannot help you then."

"You mean you'll not take the case?"

"Exactly."

She frowned. "I had no idea the third degree would be applied to me. I—well, his name is—Philip Orme."

Philip Orme! Vaughn, schooled as he was in hiding his feelings, gave a perceptible start. Mrs. Van Pruyn, noticing it, became agitated at once. "You know then! Somebody told you! Oh, Heavens, the things will be on everybody's lips—in the papers. What *will* Mr. Orme think?"

"Calm yourself, Mrs. Van Pruyn. I was surprised, naturally, at your mention of Mr. Orme's name, as he is a very well-known clubman and millionaire—"

"Do you know him?" she interrupted.

"Slightly, yes—as I know dozens of other Wall Street brokers. Your confidence, it is quite unnecessary to say, shall be held sacred."

This seemed to reassure her. "And you'll take the case?" she asked eagerly.

"I think so."

"And your compensation?"

"We'll arrange everything to-morrow. I'll take a run out to Kensington Park. You'll be at home at four o'clock?"

"Yes."

"Thank you. You may expect me then."

As Bettina Van Pruyn rose to go she had one last question to ask. She flushed and shifted her gaze. "It will not be necessary to—to arrest the blackmailers if you discover who they are?"

"Why, isn't that what you want me to do?"

"Certainly not. That would mean publicity. If I hadn't feared publicity I could have had them apprehended at the rock when I placed the money there—I could have marked the bills. But—well, you understand, of course?"

Vaughn smiled. "To be sure. You simply want me to locate the blackmailer or blackmailers and then report to you?"

"Precisely. Thank you so much, Mr. Vaughn. Good day."

Vaughn watched the elegantly clad figure "dip" down the hall toward the elevator. "How many more cases of blackmail will be placed in my hands to-day?" he chuckled to himself.

CHAPTER II.

THE REV. JOHN MYRNE.

BUT two were all—for that day!

The next morning immediately after breakfast Vaughn drove out to Kensington Park, with McSurely, his chief aid, at the wheel. The car, while new, had been broken in, and Mac was a clever driver, who lost as little unnecessary time as a trolley motorman eager to creep up on a delayed schedule; so the run was made quickly and pleasurably.

Kensington Park, which was a restricted residential district, lay north of the village of Grassmere on a series of gentle slopes, which for the most part were heavily wooded. It was while Vaughn's car was bowling down the main street of Grassmere at a rather sober pace—for McSurely through bitter experience had learned to respect rural speed ordinances—when a car that was approaching from the opposite direction pulled up suddenly just after passing, and a man stood up in the tonneau and called back: "Hello there, Vaughn! You're just the man I want to see."

"Pull up, Mac," said Vaughn. "That's Romney Peyton, of Wall Street."

Romney Peyton, a dapper little man in a Panama hat and a shantung-silk suit, hurried up.

"Give me five minutes," he said, "and it will save me a visit to your office later in the day."

"Certainly," answered Vaughn. "Get in." He made room on the seat and opened the door.

Peyton accepted the invitation with alacrity. "It's a rather private matter I want to discuss with you," he said in low tones with a significant glance at Mac's broad back in front.

"Drive us to the curb, Mac," directed Vaughn, "then go into the drug-store there at the corner and get yourself a smoke."

Mac grinned and obeyed orders. In a moment the car had been drawn up beside the curb out of the way of passing vehicles, and he was swinging down the street.

Mr. Romney Peyton was evidently a man who regarded time as money. In a highly pitched tenor, accompanied by many facial twists and contortions as well as little theatrical gestures made with nervous white hands, he plunged right into the matter that was agitating him.

"Blackmail!" he hurled at Vaughn. "Regular old-style blackmail! Sounds like the hair-raising penny dreadfuls I used to read in my youth. Twenty thousand dollars in instalments of ten thousand each—that's what they've bled me for already. They told me to put the cash in the mouth of one of the big bronze lions at my gate, and like a whipped little boy I did. I felt like consulting you then, but it was a nasty business and I tried to forget all about it; but when I got a third letter demanding another ten thousand I decided I couldn't stand the pressure. Now, Vaughn, you're a specialist in things of this sort—few as good, none better—tell me, man, what am I to do?" Romney Peyton flung out a phonographic little laugh, but in spite of his attempt at jocularity Vaughn could see that in reality he was quite as worried as either Philip Orme or Bettina Van Pruyn.

As for Vaughn's own feelings, he was astonished, of course, but not as much so as when Mrs. Van Pruyn had visited his office the day before. He had already made up his mind that Kensington Park was a regular hotbed of blackmail—a paradise for some rather bungling party who had through the craven fear of his victims "got away" with it to a really amazing degree; and he looked upon Peyton's disclosure as simply the third in a series. But—and here was the rub—if, say, half a dozen others had been blackmailed and were to take their troubles to other detectives, of whom there were a disconcerting plenty in New York, fancy the cross currents of sleuthing that might be developed, not to mention the possibilities of some rather racy and sensational exposures that would make society giggle and gasp! Vaughn chuckled involuntarily.

"Come," Peyton prodded him, "what am I to do?"

"Let me see the letters," said Vaughn persuasively.

The broker hesitated, then produced the three. They were written on paper with a different water-mark, and the phraseology was slightly changed, but there was the same handwriting under a second disguise—an extreme back hand, which, however, was so forgetful of itself as to slant forward every three or four words. As in the others, no names were mentioned, but the letter ended with the underlined query: "Do you want the one nearest and dearest to you to learn of—you know what?"

"May I keep these, Mr. Peyton?"

"Certainly."

"Thank you. Who is this 'one nearest and dearest to you'?"

"My wife. And what makes it worse, she has nervous prostration. You see, that's where they have me. She's a—h-m—a rather difficult woman even when she's well—inclined to a rather puritanical philosophy and so on—so in her present condition the shock of hearing all this miserable stuff would kill her."

"What 'miserable stuff'?"

"What the blackmailer has up his sleeve."

Vaughn met his eye. "Is it true—based on fact?"

"Well, yes—to be perfectly frank."

"Thank you." The detective was really grateful for the avowal after the wretched circumlocution of Orme and Mrs. Van Pruyn. "Briefly, Mr. Peyton, what is the basis for the blackmail—some episode in your private life?"

"Exactly. A foolish little lark with a certain rather well-known actress—you're not asking me to mention the lady's name?"

"Certainly not."

Peyton gave a forced laugh. "Just the usual aberration, Mr. Vaughn. I'm a business man—sometimes get dead tired of the grind. Then a stage charmer seems quite the tonic for my jaded spirits—a cabaret—a supper—and—well, the same old foolishness. What is there about it so terrible? Nothing at all. Only Mrs. Peyton is a difficult woman—and ill besides.

If it hadn't been for that I would have notified the police and treated the fellow to a surprise when he came for the money."

"Have you any suspicion who the black-mailer is?"

"A very strong suspicion—Philip Orme, the wastrel millionaire, stock manipulator, and all-around scoundrel."

Vaughn had expected it, yet he tried to look sufficiently surprised. "Very extraordinary indeed. Why should Mr. Orme stoop to this kind of business?"

"To get even, that's all. Orme is a dishonest man and I've said so."

"To whom?"

"Half a dozen men in the Street."

"No one else? No—ladies?"

"Of course not. Why should I go to women with my troubles?"

"Had you intended telling some lady?"

"Why, no. What are you driving at?"

Here was a puzzle. Either Peyton was lying most artistically, or Philip Orme was far astray in his suspicion that the broker had been blackmailing him. Vaughn decided on a rather bold question.

"Mr. Peyton, are you acquainted with Miss Claire Trevor?"

"Slightly. We have met at several society functions." Peyton's tone was only casual. The detective decided he was telling the truth.

The two talked a few moments longer, Vaughn making some inquiries about the Kensington Park colony; and then on his agreement to take the case Peyton sprang out of the car and hurried back to his own roadster, which had been waiting. At the same moment McSurely emerged from the drug-store at the corner, threw away his cigarette, approached rapidly, resumed his seat at the wheel and drove on. Mac was a close-lipped individual who usually asked as little as he told, but he could not forego a grinning query now:

"Sure, chief, I know it's a grand case you're working on, and I'm wondering—just to myself—if you're going to be good and give me a bit of a lead before the whole thing is blabbed in the papers."

Vaughn laughed. "You'll find out soon enough, Mac. Maybe I'll be calling on you to help me out at any moment."

"Thank you, chief. My sleuth sense is itching to get busy."

They left Grassmere and McSurely made the hill that led to Kensington Park at a dizzy clip. A hedged enclosure stretched before them apparently for several miles. A rustic sign informed them the place was the one they were seeking, but no getaway was in sight. The road branched right and left.

"Which way?" inquired McSurely.

Suddenly Vaughn spied through the hedge, at a point where the foliage was sparse, a tall, powerfully built young man. He had felled a half-dead tree and now was chopping it into firewood. The detective called to him and asked the way to the nearest gate. The young man approached the hedge and then opened a gate which had been hidden by creeping ivy.

"Come in here," he said with a pleasant smile. "This gate is seldom used except by me. I sometimes run my roadster in this way when I'm in a hurry. The main gateway is up at the other end of the park."

"Thanks for your kindness," said Vaughn.

"Not at all."

The faint tracks leading to the gate were grass-grown, showing they were seldom used. McSurely followed them inside the park, then pulled up suddenly.

"The engine's sizzling and I forgot to fill the water-bag." He turned to the young wood-chopper. "Any water handy?"

"Plenty. Take your bag and go to that door." He pointed to the rear door of a picturesque little Queen Anne rectory nestling against an equally picturesque Gothic church. Both were almost covered with vines. "If the housekeeper is cranky," he continued with twinkling eyes while Mac fished out the water-bag, "tell her Mr. Myrne sent you."

Vaughn hazarded the guess that this big, handsome, athletic wood-chopper was a clergyman—the rector of the little church yonder. He had met ministers of this type before—an essentially modern type, preachers who emphasize the things of this life rather than the insubstantialities of the next, yet who are no less men of God on this account.

"I'm wondering if you're not the rector of that attractive little church," said Vaughn.

"You've struck it," answered the other with his singularly winning smile. "That's St. George's and I'm it's boss." A rather odd way for a clergyman to talk, thought Vaughn. The Rev. Mr. Myrne evidently thought so, too, for he chuckled with a sort of boyish mischievousness. At that he was very young, certainly not much over twenty-seven. He was a superbly developed specimen of college athlete, and quite involuntarily Vaughn asked him the question:

"How on earth did you ever happen to choose the ministry for a calling?"

He laughed. "They told me it was an easy life; and so—"

"Come," Vaughn chided him, joining in his mirth, "no man is hunting ease who chops wood for sport! You'll have to give me another reason."

Myrne picked up his ax, a rather peculiar one of apparently foreign manufacture, and absently ran his fingers over the edge. "My reason," he said gravely, "was a very simple one. I wanted to do something for somebody—as much as possible for as many as possible." On the lips of some men it might have sounded like grandiloquence. Not so on Myrne's, however; he had an air of unmistakable sincerity.

"And do you find adequate opportunities here in a residential park inhabited by society millionaires?" queried Vaughn, smiling in spite of himself.

Sudden bitterness flashed from the young man's fine eyes. "No, unfortunately. My parishioners are the embodiment of selfishness. I have never yet been able to penetrate their world—nor have they succeeded in penetrating mine." He laughed triumphantly. "They little dream what sort of man John Myrne is. I used to flay them from the pulpit; but now—" He caught himself as though realizing at last he was talking to a perfect stranger and then half turned away.

"Won't you go on?" urged Vaughn. "I am interested."

The detective's face, strong, genial, full of humanness, invited confidence; but the

Rev. John Myrne shook his head rather moodily. "There's one exception to the rule here in Kensington Park," he burst out at last, as though unable to resist the temptation to give credit to whom it belonged, "and this person's charities are worthy of a whole book of sonnets!"

"And which of your millionaires is he?"

"I am not at liberty to say."

There was a pause. Myrne turned to his tree again, sighed heavily, then swung his foreign-looking ax. He had a good stroke, the stroke of a practised woodsman; and Vaughn, watching him, thought of Gladstone, the great English premier, who had been an enthusiastic wood-chopper almost up to the time of his death. Myrne had plenty of opportunity for his favorite exercise here in Kensington Park. Much of the tract was still densely wooded; sumacs predominating; and whenever a millionaire chose a site for a new suburban palace, the trees of course had to be cut down.

"And I try to do twice as much as any of the workmen," laughed the young minister, who Vaughn had adroitly drawn into conversation again.

McSurely, who had been detained a moment, returned with his bag full of water and proceeded to cool off the engine. Meanwhile Vaughn asked Myrne the way to Philip Orme's, Peyton's and Mrs. Van Pruyn's, hoping he might be tempted to express an opinion or so concerning these persons; but he gave only the bare directions, smiled, and returned to his wood-chopping.

"Drive on, Mac," said Vaughn.

As he waved good-by to Myrne he heard an auto-horn in the road on the other side of the hedge. The gate had not yet been closed, and as he turned he saw a young woman in an ultrasmart, blue sport roadster entering the park. He was at once struck with her rare beauty. With eyes that sparkled, cheeks glowing with health, old-gold hair half escaping from its pins, letting a vagrant curl or so peep from beneath her broad-brimmed Panama, and, most of all, with the charming smile that lighted her face as he looked at Myrne, she was indeed a dazzling picture in the summer sunshine.

"John!" she cried gaily.

"Claire!"

And Myrne threw down his ax and went toward the blue sport roadster with every evidence of a man who was deeply in love.

That was all Vaughn saw—and heard. There was an abrupt turn in the driveway, which McSurely negotiated with exasperating quickness, and a copse of saplings completely hid the scene they had just left. *Claire Trevor!* A rather piquant development. Philip Orme was in love with Claire Trevor; Claire Trevor—if that smile was to be considered—was very much interested in the Rev. John Myrne; and the way the Rev. John had thrown down his ax and hurried to the sport roadster was proof he was more than interested in Miss Claire Trevor. And behind this little drama of sentiment loomed the ugly background of blackmail! More and more Owen Vaughn was feeling the zest of the hunter. His cases always had to "grow" on him. This one was growing like one of those miraculous plants over which Hindu fakirs mumble their sublimated stuff and make passes!

Kensington Park contained dozens of palatial homes, and among the finest were Orme's Florentine villa, Mrs. Van Pruyn's quaint replica of a Dutch Colonial mansion, and Peyton's English abbey. Vaughn smiled as he whirled by the gate of the last and spied the huge mouth of the fierce bronze lion in which the broker had tremblingly placed the hush money demanded of him. How craven-hearted they were, these society folk, how facile in perpetrating scandal, how panic-stricken at the possibility of it being found out! The family skeleton, like conscience, makes cowards of us all.

Just inside the main gateway, an enormous granite arch covered with ivy, were the two most attractive residences in the park—at least, in Vaughn's opinion. He bade McSurely slow up to a snail-creep while he interestedly surveyed them. They faced each other. One was occupied, the other looked untenanted. Both were surrounded by beautiful grounds. The occupied one was of pearl-gray sandstone in the florid Italian Renaissance style of architecture; the other was Moorish in buff and terra-cotta.

"That's my sort of house," remarked Vaughn, nodding toward the latter. "Think of its cool court and fountain on a sweltering day like this! Mac, how would you like to own it?"

"Why not rent it?" smiled Mac. "It's empty."

"That kind of place is not for rent. Give her gas, Mac. I must be getting back to town."

At the office the biggest surprise of the case so far was in store for Vaughn. A lady was waiting to see him—none other than Claire Trevor herself! "More blackmail! Will it never end?" thought the detective as he gazed into the girl's clear, hazel eyes. Those eyes had sparkled when resting on John Myrne; now they were troubled and anxious. But after Vaughn had smiled reassuringly and Miss Trevor had settled herself in the comfortable leather-upholstered chair the gloom lifted. She even smiled herself—a very fetching smile hinting strongly of a rather elfin sense of humor. "A girl of many moods," was his final comment to himself. "Unless I'm very much mistaken she's laboring under a tense nervous strain."

"Well, Miss Trevor?" he queried.

She began animatedly. "I'm an orphan, you know, Mr. Vaughn, so I have no father to go to—only a very old, very deaf, very nervous aunt lives with me, and it would kill her if I told her; I can't go to my lawyers, for they're stupid; I can't go to the police, for then I'd be afraid the blackmailers might make good their threat to kill me. So I've come to the famous Owen Vaughn, sleuth extraordinary!"

She laughed softly and handed him a letter. He was not at all surprised to see the same old chirography, only under a new disguise—this time showing a stiff, awkward stroke, as though having been written by a foreigner who was having difficulty in mastering English. The few lines read as follows:

MISS CLAIRE TREVOR:

You need not think for a minute I'm not onto your little game when you say you're so poor, living in a fine house and having an auto and so forth. I've written you twice to put that five thousand under the loose brick in your walk at the

gate, and unless it is there mighty soon I'll tell all I know to the world.

(Signed) RED HAND.

After reading this highly threatening epistle Vaughn's first inclination was to laugh. But a quick glance at Claire Trevor's face, which had grown portentously solemn, decided him to maintain a judicial gravity.

"Very unusual," he commented after a moment's thought. "Where are the other letters?"

"I've lost them."

"That's awkward."

"No doubt—but first I regarded the matter as only a joke."

"But now you take it seriously—"

"Very seriously indeed. Why, the man threatens my life—"

"You say 'the man.' Maybe it's a woman—"

"Oh, no—"

"Why not?"

"A woman wouldn't go about it in that bungling way. A woman would show more *finesse*."

Vaughn smiled. "Seems to me this letter shows plenty of *finesse*—"

"That crude thing?"

"What more can you ask if it accomplishes its purpose? According to your own confession it has frightened you into coming to me."

She blushed rosily—beautifully. Vaughn, watching her, involuntarily envisioned the dissipated face of Philip Orme. He loved this radiant creature: what a monstrous violation of the eternal fitness of things if he won her!

"You're quite right, Mr. Vaughn," she said briskly. "I had thought of the writer as an ignorant foreigner. Perhaps he's the superclever leader of some gang of professional blackmailers hiding behind the camouflage of stupidity." And she laughed merrily.

She was strangely difficult to follow. Her lightning alternations of mood quite dazzled Vaughn. He decided to fall back on undemonstrative professionalism and let her do all the flitting from emotion to emotion.

"The writer of this letter, Miss Trevor, says he'll tell the world 'all he knows.' What does he know?"

At this direct question Claire Trevor, unlike Orme, Peyton, and Bettina Van Pruyn, showed not the slightest embarrassment. She looked Vaughn full in the eye. "I don't know. I don't think I've ever done anything that would shock a sensitive world—or my doubly sensitive friends"—she gave another of her sudden laughs—"unless I do wicked things *à la Dr. Jekyll* and *Mr. Hyde*! But *Dr. Jekyll* remembered his *Mr. Hyde* villainies, didn't he? I can recall none of mine." She grew serious again. "Maybe the blackmailer knows something about the Trevors in general that he wants me to atone for in particular. But there are precious few Trevors left. I have a cousin in South America, but nobody knows anything about him, I least of all; and then another cousin of mine, a girl, married a Polish pianist and is living now in Warsaw. If the war has spared her—and that's all, besides my poor old aunty, who lives with me."

Vaughn waited a moment while she fidgeted in her chair. She was at last showing marked nervousness.

"The blackmailer asks for five thousand dollars. Now, while that is a considerable sum it might have been a great deal more—"

"Why, five thousand dollars is a *lot* of money!" she burst out.

"Not to some people. If you were as frightened as you say, why didn't you pay it and get rid of the bother?"

"But I hadn't the five thousand dollars, Mr. Vaughn. Nobody knows it, but aunty and I are—well, almost poor. Just because I own a fine house is no sign—" She broke off abruptly.

"I see," said Vaughn—although he did *not* see!

"That reminds me," she said, rising, "you'll make your fee reasonable? I—"

Vaughn smiled. "Don't worry about that, Miss Trevor. But—I haven't taken the case yet—"

"But you will? Oh, Mr. Vaughn, you must!"

"If I find the culprit, what shall I do with him?"

Her eyes blazed. "Bring him to me!"

"You want to murder him?" he laughed.

Her own laughter rang out clear and gay. "Wait and see! I'll treat him to a picturesque fate. Now, Mr. Vaughn, is there anything I can do to help you?"

"Perhaps, Miss Trevor. I'll let you know."

She wrote her address and telephone number on her artistically engraved calling-card and handed it to him. "Good day, Mr. Vaughn. I'm trusting to your quite superhuman cleverness."

He accompanied her to the elevator, then hurried back to the office window and watched her drive jauntily away in her blue sport roadster. Of all his four clients she had interested him the most.

"Some case!" he chuckled to himself. "The blackmailer—for there's only one, I'll wager on that—threatens to expose Orme to Miss Claire Trevor, Mrs. Van Pruyn to Orme, Peyton to his wife, and this charming girl to the world! As for the blackmailer himself, he's an incredibly crude specimen of the breed; but he has a bunch of egregious cowards to work—that is, with the exception of Miss Trevor. She strikes me as a singularly courageous girl despite her little quivers and quavers." He went to the door leading to the main office. "McSurely!"

"Yes, chief?" Mac was with him in an instant.

"Start a phone chase for Mr. Philip Orme. First his office, then the Lenox Club, then Kensington Park. Tell him I want to see him as soon as possible here at the office. I'll wait here to catch him—so, Mac, phone down to the restaurant for a slice of rare roast, a pot of coffee, and—what was that pie I cracked up to you the other day?"

"Prune, with whipped cream, chief."

"Make it prune with whipped cream, Mac. And show your speed."

CHAPTER III.

"COLONEL JUDSON BADGER."

MCSURELY connected with Orme at his club; and within the hour the millionaire was at Vaughn's office.

"You'll take the case?"

"Yes."

"Good! Already working on it?"

"More or less."

"Ah," cried Orme eagerly, his eyes brightening, "what have you discovered?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing? You haven't fastened the gilt on Peyton and Scarborough?"

"Certainly not. Sit down, Mr. Orme."

Philip Orme's hard face fell. He sank upon the chair with a barely suppressed oath, then leaned his heavy chin on the cobra-headed cane, and stared dully into space. Idly Vaughn wondered what the middle-aged Dresden-china doll, Bettina Van Pruyn, could see in him. Perhaps the stories of his sentimental conquests attracted her, or his sophisticated air which seemed to hint great mysteries of worldly wisdom. At any rate, her sole object in life just now was to spare this rounder's delicate sensibilities the shocking revelation of some more or less hectic episode in her past. As if anything could shock a man like Philip Orme! Vaughn, studying him, almost showed his disgust.

"Mr. Orme," he said briskly, "this is in a sense the most baffling case I have ever worked on."

"Why so?" grunted Orme peevishly. "Isn't it practically certain Peyton and Scarborough are the guilty parties?"

Vaughn disregarded the question by asking another. "Listen. Is there any house at Kensington Park—furnished—that I could occupy for a month?"

Orme's mouth opened. "What do you want a house for? Going into society?"

"Exactly."

"What!"

"Is there such a house?"

"Only one place there—my brother's."

"Good!" cried Vaughn with real enthusiasm. "Where is he?"

"In California."

"Wire him at once. Say your friend, Colonel Judson Badger, the millionaire Wyoming cattleman, wants it—"

"But the house isn't for rent—"

"What if it isn't? Ask your brother to do this as a favor to *you*—tell him you'll be responsible."

Orme had difficulty in taking it in. "You mean you'll have to do the society stunt

out at Kensington Park to grab Peyton and Scarborough?"

Vaughn smiled. "You've struck it—clever man!"

"But what's the use? I could go up to them right now and lay my hands on them."

"Well, why don't you? I didn't ask for the case—"

"Wait," put in Orme. "I simply don't see—"

"Yes, you do. Listen. In the first place, Peyton and Scarborough are not the blackmailers. I have an idea a regular professional gang is after you. Now I'm Colonel Judson Badger—in the proper rigging, of course; and I'll have my wife with me. You'll introduce us into your set. I'll entertain—royally; spend—prodigally. Our blackmailing friends will sit up and take notice. 'Here's our meat,' they will say in beautiful slang. 'This Western mutt is made to order for us.' To bait them I'll 'plant' a scandal here in Manhattan. Some gay night I'll let them see me with a chorus girl or something of the sort. They'll threaten to tell my wife—we'll grab them."

Orme groaned. "Is it necessary to go to all this trouble to catch them?"

"It's the quickest and surest way."

"But who'll have to put up the money?"

"You, of course. Who's asking me to take the case but you?"

"How much will it take?"

Vaughn chuckled. "You know more about the cost of society splurging than I. I'll have to run the house in befitting style—with as many servants as the richest of my neighbors—my wife and I will have to wear the necessary modern equivalent of purple and fine linen—and I'll have to give at least one staggeringly sensational 'function.' Now you can figure it up."

"Good Lord!" gasped Orme, wiping the perspiration from his brow with a lavender silk handkerchief; "this is awful! And I'll have to pay out all this money in addition to the twenty-five thousand I've already put into the hollow tree?"

Vaughn's manner was irritatingly cool—and on an irritatingly hot day. "That's my ultimatum, Mr. Orme. At that you'll be saving money. Besides, wouldn't you rather pay out twice what this little stunt

will cost rather than lose Miss Trevor's good opinion?"

That settled it. Orme gave in without further argument, promising to wire his brother at once. "It's a mere formality," he said, rising to go. "My brother will be perfectly willing to do this for me."

"Mum's the word," Vaughn reminded him smilingly. "We must observe the utmost secrecy. You'll be the only man in New York who knows that Owen Vaughn and Colonel Judson Badger are one and the same."

Orme hesitated at the door, munching his cobra in heavy embarrassment. "You'll *guarantee* to grab Peyton and Scarborough—or whoever they are?"

"Certainly not," was the curt rejoinder. "I can only promise to do my best."

"You'll see I know what I'm talking about," Orme flung back from the hall. "Peyton and Scarborough are the birds you'll bring down."

With a breath of relief Vaughn closed the door. Then he proceeded to do some very important telephoning. First he called up Mrs. Van Pruyn and stated he was too busy to make the run out to Kensington Park and call on her at four o'clock, as he had promised; but he spoke reassuringly about the case. "I'm hopeful of doing something very shortly," he said. "You may not hear from me for several days. But don't be alarmed—no news is good news."

He then telephoned Romney Peyton and Claire Trevor in much the same vein. Peyton showed more anxiety than he had exhibited in the morning at the accidental meeting in Grassmere; but Miss Trevor laughed merrily over the wire, declaring she was trusting absolutely in him—and fate. "Only," she insisted, "I'd like *hourly* reports—I'd even like to go flash-lighting with you as a confederate man-hunter—it's so fascinating!"

That evening Orme telephoned Vaughn that his brother, Stuyvesant Orme, had wired permission to use the house.

"Good!" cried the detective. "When can you have it ready?"

"Day after to-morrow."

"Suits me exactly. How about the servants?"

"I'll let you have some of mine—I'm not really keeping house. I'd never pretend to stay out there at all if it weren't to be near—you know who!" And a hoarse chuckle came over the wire; Vaughn knew he was referring to Claire Trevor, of course. Orme continued: "And I'll hire the rest for you."

Vaughn laughed. "See to everybody except my valet and my wife's maid. We'll provide these—"

"By the way, are you really married?" queried Orme.

"I'm not, but Colonel Judson Badger is!"

"I see."

"Now you'd better begin telling the Kensington Park colonists that your millionaire friend, Colonel Judson Badger, of Wyoming, will be here in a few days. And hadn't you better introduce us at some quiet little function—say, a dinner-party?"

Orme hesitated. "But I say, Vaughn, this isn't the easiest thing in the world you're asking—can you vouch for Mrs. Judson Badger?"

Vaughn chuckled. "You mean you're afraid she won't act the part?"

"Yes—frankly. Some of those Kensington people have awfully delicate social sensibilities, you know."

Vaughn was roaring by now. "Don't worry about Mrs. Badger. You'll think a veritable modern Queen of Sheba has appeared in your midst! Good-by." And he hung up the receiver.

That night he called at a certain Washington Square apartment-house and pressed the bell under a name-plate engraved in small, unobtrusive script—"Miss Margot Dale, Investigator." "Investigator!" What did that stand for? An investigator into chemistry, biology, sociology, what? Vaughn had laughingly asked the lady dozens of times why she hadn't used the good old word, "detective"—or if she wanted to lay emphasis on the gilded character of her work, "detective de luxe"; but she always declared—with an amused smile—that a sleuth of her sort had to be distinctly *de rigueur*, so she had decided to drop the hated term entirely.

"The word 'detective,'" she was wont to say, "sounds supervulgar and spine-chilling to the sensitive ears of society. So, while

I'm really nothing but a pry-nose, I call myself an investigator!"

Miss Margot Dale was at home and received Mr. Owen Vaughn with warm cordiality. As he stood holding her patrician hand, following with approving eyes the chiseled lines of her white arm under its gauzy crêpe up to the ravishing shoulder, the shell-like ear, the head of blue-black hair, the exquisitely fair and oval face, he said to himself—as he had reassured Orme—that "Mrs. Judson Badger" would create a genuine sensation among the Kensington colonists both by reason of her beauty and distinction.

Margot Dale had an eye for artistic effects. Her big living-room—she called it her *salon*, with the regulation French nasal twang—was decorated in the subtle pastel shade that set off her own radiant loveliness. A frame for the picture, a setting for the jewel—that was what her friends called the room. Its luxuriousness attested the financial success she had achieved in sleuthing for certain exclusive circles of ultrasmart society. She and Vaughn had worked on many a case together, and the two were good friends.

Margot was a delightful hostess, and immediately she rang for the samovar. "We'll have some of my famous Russian tea," she said with a dazzling little smile. "My dear Owen, it's the very kind the late Czar of Russia used to drink at the Winter Palace before the evil days fell upon him!"

The samovar was wheeled in on a portable table by Margot's Indian maid, Shadow, a tall, straight, sullenly majestic creature, a full-blood Choctaw the investigator had picked up in Oklahoma.

"Just the maid for Mrs. Judson," said Vaughn to himself, as he watched the lissomely graceful girl. "What stunning wild Western atmosphere!"

The tea was really delicious, and Margot knew how much lemon-juice to squeeze into it to the very drop.

"Well, Margot, been busy lately?" queried Vaughn as she bunched the downy pillows behind him.

"I'm just beginning on a case—one that's really out of my line; but I consented to take it because the man involved is a friend

of mine." She dropped a lump of sugar into her cup daintily. "Blackmail! What a vulgar sound the word has—"

"Blackmail?" broke in Vaughn, starting.

"Yes; Jimmie Scarborough, the Kensington Park high-roller—"

Vaughn gasped. "What! *You're* working on that, too?"

It was Margot's turn to start. "Are you?"

"*Am* I?" Vaughn gave a chuckle. "Leave that samovar, Margot, and sit down here. I want to talk to you."

Margot dropped down beside him mechanically. "But—what does Scarborough mean—going to you—and then coming to me?"

"Scarborough hasn't seen me," laughed Vaughn, "but I can outline the case just the same." Whereupon he did so, paralleling it with the cases of Orme, Mrs. Van Pruyn, Claire Trevor, and Peyton. Margot was thoroughly mystified.

"You've developed the sixth sense!" she cried. "You—"

"Not at all, my dear Margot. I'm simply following a lead I have—a lead that's as easy to follow as Fifth Avenue on a sunny afternoon!" And briefly, yet with sufficient detail he told her of the wholesale nature of the Kensington Park blackmail, citing the cases in the order they had been presented to him. Margot was dumfounded. Vaughn enjoyed her frank wonder, as she prided herself on her professional sophistication.

"We'll work together," he proposed. "What do you say?"

"Yes, of course," she answered rather blankly, still under the thrall of it. "I can't seem to take it in. Who's behind it? Some New York gangster? How'll we go about it? I'm all at sea."

He laughed mysteriously. "How would you like to get married?"

"I? With my career? Absurd! Besides, what has that to do with this blackmailing case?"

"Everything in the world. If I remember, you're from California, aren't you?"

"Yes. Well?"

"Colonel Judson Badger wants a Western wife—so, my dear Margot, you'll do!"

"What *are* you talking about, Owen? Are you going crazy right here under my eyes?"

"Colonel Judson Badger—"

"Who *is* this Colonel Judson Badger?" she interrupted impatiently.

"A millionaire Wyoming cattleman—an enthusiast on the subject of trial marriages. He wants to marry you for a month, and *only* a month. At the end of that time you'll revert to bachelor girlhood and will resume your maiden name. But that month will be one rare and radiant dream, Margot! He'll take you to the finest house in Kensington Park and install you as its queen. You'll entertain and be entertained—"

"And be blackmailed?" she broke in.

"Exactly."

She looked at him straight, then burst into hilarious laughter. "Owen Vaughn, *you're* the impossible Colonel Judson Badger—"

"Of course. You're a long time guessing it."

"Magnificent!" she cried. "The inspiration of a genius!"

"Don't put me in the Hall of Fame yet," said Vaughn slowly. "It may not work at all; but it rather strikes me as a pretty good way to get at our friends the blackmailers. It'll cost money, but Philip Orme has plenty of that. If the culprits are members of the Kensington Park colony we'll have the advantage of mingling with them socially and thus getting numerous chances to use our eyes unknown to them; and no matter who they are—society people or New York gangsters—we'll give them a temptation to blackmail us that they can't resist. We'll be setting a simple though highly effective little trap, and when once we have them it will be good-by to the game as played at Kensington Park."

They had a long consultation, discussing ways and means and finally arranging the "plant" down to the smallest details. Margot entered into the scheme with the greatest enthusiasm, declaring she was prepared to score a brilliant success in the rôle of Mrs. Judson Badger.

"I already have some stunning gowns—" she began.

"We'll make Orme buy you half a dozen more," interrupted Vaughn with a grim

laugh. "Scour Fifth Avenue and choose its finest. We'll do the thing right."

It was nearly midnight when he rose to go. Margot made him join her in another cup of tea, and they drank to the health and social success of Colonel and Mrs. Judson Badger.

The next evening, under cover of the friendly dusk, Philip Orme called for Vaughn in his big yellow-and-black foreign car and drove him out to the mansion he was to occupy. A pleasant surprise awaited him. The house was none other than the Moorish one that had attracted him on his first visit to the park.

"I live two doors down, across the street," said Orme as they sprang from the car, "and you have a charming neighbor immediately opposite."

"Who?"

"Miss Trevor."

"You don't say so," laughed the detective. "This is a coincidence—" He turned and looked across the street at a lighted window in the second story musingly.

"That's her room," half panted Orme passionately. "God, but I love that girl!"

"Come," said Vaughn shortly. "We'll have to hurry; I must get back to town."

The house was even more attractive inside than out. Vaughn was delighted with everything—most of all, with the cool, embowered *patio*, in which an artistic bronze fountain was already plashing. The covers had been removed from the furniture, the magnificent tapestried room had been aired, and the whole place looked ready for occupancy.

"I'll have all the servants Mrs. Badger will require by to-morrow," chuckled Orme, who had evidently decided to forget the expense and get what fun he could out of it, "and all will have the very best recommendations."

"We'll move in day after to-morrow," rejoined Vaughn. "Mrs. Badger dislikes the vulgar publicity of hotels, so we'll come here immediately after leaving the train. Meet us with your car—and in the mean time pay the servants their month's wages in advance and deposit twenty-five thousand dollars in the bank for the colonel to draw on. That will do for a starter—"

"Good Heavens!" gasped Orme.

Vaughn's eyes twinkled. "And how about a limousine for Mrs. Badger and a touring-car and a sport roadster for myself?"

"There are several cars in my brother's garage—"

"And we must each have our own individual chauffeur, you know!"

Orme groaned. "By Jove, I'd have saved money by submitting to further blackmail!"

Vaughn only laughed as they entered the car to drive back to the city. In a few moments Orme recovered his usual humor and then began boring the detective with stupid stories—meant to be uproariously funny—about the people with whom he would soon be hobnobbing.

"Oh, but we're a bunch of rotters," chuckled the flabby millionaire. "We certainly have had some gay times out here in old Kensington—"

"By the way," Vaughn interrupted, "who will you have at the dinner in honor of Mrs. Badger and myself?" Orme gave the list, which included Claire Trevor and Bettina Van Pruyn.

"Colonel Badger" studied a moment. "Too bad we can't have those ferocious enemies of yours, Messrs. Peyton and Scarborough. Wait, I've just thought—how about the Rev. John Myrne?"

"Myrne?" echoed Orme, surprised. "The minister? What do you want with him?"

Vaughn smiled. "Don't you think he'll impart dignity and tone to the occasion?"

"Nonsense! I'm not any too fond of the reverend wood-chopper—he's got it in for the respectable and well-to-do, always spilling crocodile tears over 'God's poor,' as he calls them. Besides, I can't rid myself of the idea that his interest in Miss Trevor is rather too warm for a minister. How he does smile at her—and from the pulpit, too!"

"You're a frequent attendant at church, Mr. Orme?"

Orme laughed. "Whenever Miss Trevor will let me go with her—which isn't often. A while back she used to ask me to go—think of it, the proud Claire asking anybody to do anything! But she had a reason for it—she was trying to inveigle me

into giving a lot of money to the reverend wood-chopper so he could take over some old rookery on the Bowery and transform it into a charity lodging-house for down-and-outs."

"And you gave him the money?"

"I? You must think me a fool." He uttered a sneering exclamation. "That fellow, Myrne, is dippy on the subject of charity anyway—always reminding the rich of the duty they owe to the poor. But we Kensington Park people fooled him!"

"How?"

"The man's ambitious—a persuasive talker, too, the sort that gets women in tears—and he certainly never would have been willing to take charge of a little church like St. George's if he hadn't expected us to hand him over all kinds of money for his fad charities. He's not the man for us at all. At college he was always in trouble with his professors on account of his radical opinions, and at some manufacturing town up-State, where he had his first charge, the people petitioned the bishop for his removal, as he openly sided with the strikers in some labor trouble there. No, my dear Colonel Badger, we won't have him at our dinner-party. He'd only be a thorn in the flesh."

The early rising moon showed a grimly determined look on Vaughn's face as he answered sharply:

"But I insist."

Orme shrugged. "Oh, as you like. But he may turn down the bid—I tell you there's no love lost between us."

CHAPTER IV.

MYRNE'S ADVENTURE.

TWO days later Colonel Judson Badger, Mrs. Judson Badger, McSurely, the colonel's French valet, and Shadow, Mrs. Badger's Choctaw maid, descended upon Stuyvesant Orme's Moorish palace with breezy Western aggressiveness, and took full possession of the place with a picturesque nonchalance that would have led anybody to believe they had left a far finer home in Wyoming and had decided to put up with this one under protest rather than otherwise. It was Vaughn's aim to give the

impression of being a very wealthy man, and he certainly made an auspicious beginning, backed up as he was by the magnificent Margot, who, in her superb traveling-suit, a creation of one of Fifth Avenue's most celebrated modistes, had enough distinction to suggest billions instead of mere millions.

Vaughn's disguise was not the traditional wild Western sort by any means—the rather untidy black Prince Albert, high-heeled boots, huge diamond stud in a "boiled" shirt, flowing tie, impossible mustache measuring a foot from tip to tip, and hat with a steeple crown and umbrella brim. The days of such rigging as this are long past—if they ever existed. Millionaire Colorado mining men and Wyoming stockmen don't invade Broadway dressed in overalls and chaps. Their whole-hearted Western cordiality of manner rather than any spectacular peculiarity of raiment betrays them. Vaughn, who knew the West and Westerners, clung to but one thing that still characterizes the prosperous, wide-awake, traveled Wyoming rancher—the modified stockman's hat. He grayed his hair, put a deep "sunburn" on his face, lined his skin with a few clever "weather" wrinkles, and resorted to enormous near-sighted glasses. It was a wonderfully effective disguise.

"Chief, you'd camouflage your own mother," was McSurely's tribute.

Orme followed instructions and "talked up" his Western friends to the Kensington Park colonists, and several evenings after their arrival he gave the dinner in their honor. It was a large and elaborate affair, between thirty and forty guests being present. Mrs. Van Pruyn and Claire Trevor were among the number. The former had eyes only for Orme; and whenever he looked at the radiant Claire, which was at least three-fourths of the time, she seemed ready to cry from grief and vexation. Claire herself was in high spirits; and Vaughn, gazing at her from behind his near-sighted glasses, no longer wondered at Orme's mad desire to win her. She was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.

The detective was disappointed at the non-appearance of the Rev. John Myrne. Orme had assured him the minister had

accepted the invitation sent him. "It's just like him," he said with his ugly scowl, "to flout etiquette and stay away. He wants to show us how he hates us."

"Us?"

"Yes, the rich."

Vaughn only smiled.

Both Colonel Judson Badger and his handsome wife made a good impression on the effete Kensington Park colonists, Margot indeed creating something of a sensation among the gentlemen guests. As for Vaughn, he listened to the others' small talk until the serving of the last course, then with a sudden portentous clearing of his throat asked in tones loud enough to be heard from one end of the table to the other:

"Who can tell me something about that interesting genius, the New York 'gangster'? I've seen him in movies and read of him in lurid stories, but I'm wondering what he really looks like." The colonel's smile was winning, and from his place beside Orme he flashed it down the length of the board.

There was a moment's silence, then Claire Trevor answered gravely: "Colonel Badger, the gangsters of New York are no joke by any means. They really exist—and commit all sorts of crimes."

"Indeed? What particular crime is their specialty? Murder? Robbery? *Blackmail*?"

The word came from the colonel's well-shaped lips with almost a clicking sound. There had been silence before—but now it seemed intensified. Margot and Vaughn, using their eyes cleverly, saw more than one of the diners start and half turn to their neighbors; so many, in fact, betrayed themselves in some slight way or other that both detectives were convinced there were present more victims of the blackmailers than had sought their professional services. Hence, no doubt, other sleuths were already working on the case—in which event, of course, there might be involuntary playing at cross purposes and all kinds of confusion.

Colonel Badger's question remained unanswered for some moments, then Claire Trevor, with a gay little laugh, exclaimed: "Colonel Badger, I half believe you know more about the New York gangsters than

we imagine! Blackmail *is* their favorite way of getting money. How'd you happen to guess it?"

"It didn't require any particular guessing, my dear young lady," rejoined the colonel with a paternal smile. "Blackmail is popular with a certain class of criminals throughout the world. But they don't go about it out West as they do here."

"No? What's their method? We're interested, colonel."

There were assenting murmurs from the others. Orme smiled behind his napkin. Margot, leaning back and screening herself with her fan, flashed her gaze here and there on a sharp lookout for any signs of self-betrayal.

Colonel Badger answered in his whole-souled, Western way: "Out in my neck of the woods, Miss Trevor, the criminal classes haven't any copyright on blackmail. The people whom you would naturally expect to be the prey of blackmailers turn blackmailers themselves."

The murmurs around the table grew into astonished exclamatives.

"What!"

"Who would have dreamed it!"

"How stunningly clever!"

"Go on, colonel," laughed Claire. "Tell us how they do it."

The colonel chuckled. "They did it to me, all right! I was moving in a—well, to tell the truth, a rather fast circle in Denver. One of the fellows I was running with, a wildcat mining-stock shark from Cripple Creek, nosed into my past, found out something he knew Mrs. Badger wouldn't be particularly happy to hear"—he chuckled again and looked across at Margot, who smiled indulgently—"and, to make a long story short, wrote me a regular cross-bones letter splashed with blood and scared me into leaving fifty thousand dollars under the gate-post. He worked several other green-horns after me, but at last was caught and then confessed." The colonel burst into a roar of laughter. "Now I call that down-right smart! When a fellow can put one over on me as easily as that I'm willing to take off my hat to him and pay out good money without whining."

The effect made by the colonel's little

story was a mixed one. Some joined in his mirth, others looked grave; but so far nobody betrayed any indications of guilt. In the midst of the mild excitement Mrs. Badger, leaning forward with flushed cheeks and flashing eyes, exclaimed sharply:

"Colonel!"

"Yes, my dear?"

"The way to keep out of blackmailers' coils is to live a clean life. If that scandalous story—whatever it was—had reached me I would have divorced you!"

The colonel gasped; so did the others. Who would have dreamed the beautiful Mrs. Badger, who looked so tolerant and amiable, was such a prude? She tempered her ferocity with a sudden merry laugh, however.

"So, my dear colonel, beware! Now that you have come to New York, you'll have to resist its manifold temptations—or the 'gangsters' will trail you. And maybe you'll be bled for twice fifty thousand dollars *this* time! If you're wise, you'll—"

There came a startling interruption—the sudden sound of a shot outside, followed by another in quick succession. Involuntarily Orme sprang up and hurried to the window.

"Myrne!" he cried. "And with a gun in his hand!"

Claire Trevor gave a little cry and ran to the window. "Oh, maybe he's hurt—maybe—"

"Don't worry," Orme half snarled. "Can't you see he's all right? He's stopping here! Nice time to come—"

Claire flashed upon him a look of disgust, then returned to the table. In a moment he followed her.

"I beg your pardon," he said to his guests with a forced smile, "for leaving you in that summary fashion; but we don't hear pistol-shots very often in Kensington Park."

"There were two shots," said Mrs. Pruyn tremulously. "I wonder who fired the second one?"

Orme laughed. "Maybe our reverend friend fired both—"

"Absurd!" interrupted Claire. "Somebody else shot at him, then he shot back. Mr. Myrne is not the sort of man to resort to firearms for any reason other than self-defense."

"Good Heavens!" cried Mrs. Van Pruyn, on the verge of tears. "A shooting affray in Kensington Park—with the rector one of the participants! I'm frightened to death—entirely too frightened to go home alone!" She turned to Orme. "Philip, you'll have to accompany me."

"Mr. Myrne!" announced the footman at the door.

All eyes turned toward the newcomer. He looked a trifle pale; and his handkerchief, slightly stained with blood, was wound around his wrist.

"John!" cried Claire, springing up and running toward him, regardless of how the act might be interpreted. "You're hurt!"

"Not at all," he answered, smiling. "The bullet just grazed the flesh." He bowed to the company and then fixed his clear, steady gaze on Orme's flushed face. "Mr. Orme, I owe you an apology for promising to be one of your party and then putting in an appearance at this late hour. Even now I can't tarry—I'm on my way home. I was called to New York on a very important matter—"

"Charity?" half sneered Orme.

Myrne gave a slight start. "You've guessed it," he said slowly.

Vaughn, who was an intensely interested onlooker, saw him flash a faint smile on Claire, who had suddenly looked troubled, and then nod reassuringly as if to say: "Don't worry—everything's all right."

"Oh, Mr. Myrne," cried Bettina Van Pruyn shrilly, "you gave us such a shock just now! What *was* the shooting about? Did you kill anybody?"

The lady evidently meant her rather sinister query as a joke; but nobody took it as one. Everybody looked portentously grave—everybody but Myrne, who, after a moment's hesitation, laughed shortly.

"Hardly, Mrs. Van Pruyn. First I shot up in the air to scare the fellow—I was sure he was meditating burglarly as I spied him in the moonlight skulking round—" He caught himself, his eyes resting on Claire. It was plain he was not an adept at dissimulation.

"Skulking around whose house, Mr. Myrne?" queried Orme. "Not mine?"

"No."

Orme smiled. "Then, Miss Trevor, it must have been yours—as you live on one side of me, and there's no house on the other!"

Claire threw back her pretty head defiantly. "I don't care. I'm not a bit scared—I think it's rather romantic!" With flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes she turned to the young clergyman. "Thank you, Mr. Myrne, for frightening the burglar away. Imagine poor aunty's terror if he had succeeded in getting into the house!"

Orme scowled: this hero-worship of the "reverend wood-chopper" even on so small a scale was infinitely distasteful to him. "Maybe he wasn't so mortally frightened, after all," he sneered. "Did you see him take to his heels, Mr. Myrne?"

"He disappeared in the woods at the rear of the house," answered Myrne quietly. "I must now bid all of you good night." He turned to the footman, who had been waiting in the doorway.

"But—" began Claire anxiously, biting her lip.

Orme was not through yet. "Just a moment, Mr. Myrne. May I ask how you happened to be carrying a gun? Haven't you ever heard of the Sullivan law? Don't you know you're liable to arrest?" And he leaned back and laughed triumphantly, evidently laboring under the delusion that he had applied a "crusher."

Myrne smiled coolly. "Maybe I have a permit to carry a pistol, Mr. Orme. Good night." And with an eloquently tender look at Claire—defiantly given before the whole company—he was gone.

The rest of the evening was stupid and constrained—the shooting had seemingly cast a spell over everybody. On the surface it was an ordinary enough affair. A skulker suspected of being a porch-climber had fired at the man who the moment before had shot in the air to frighten him. Nothing sensational here—nothing particularly disquieting; but—*who was this skulker?*

Vaughn asked himself that question, Margot asked herself—and perhaps a dozen others did likewise.

Claire Trevor, who logically might have been expected to be the one most agitated

by the occurrence, seemed to be the one least concerned. Her gaiety was sparkling, tireless; she even bestowed a smile or so on Orme.

However, she was the first to leave, declaring that her aunt, who was unwell, might be needing her; and her departure was the signal for the breaking up of the party. As the means of introducing Colonel Judson Badger and Mrs. Badger to Kensington Park society, the dinner had been a success; but the pleasure of the guests had in a sense been spoiled by the Rev. John Myrne's sinister little adventure with the mysterious skulker.

"The reverend wood-chopper is always trespassing on my preserves," growled Orme as he bade Colonel and Mrs. Badger good night. "That man is my evil genius. He's trying to win the only girl I've ever loved—and God only knows what next he'll attempt!"

Margot and Vaughn crossed the moonlit avenue slowly.

"Well, what do you think?" she queried.

"I'm not thinking—yet. I'm only wondering."

"Rather baffling case, eh?"

"Rather, yes."

"Answer me one question, Owen. Do you think the blackmailer sat at the table?"

He smiled. "I tell you I'm not thinking—"

"And the mysterious man who shot the handsome young minister—is he connected with the case?"

"My dear Margot, you're as full of questions as a schoolgirl is of romantic foolishness. I never knew you to be so—well, enthusiastically unprofessional!"

He chuckled as they crossed the shadowy piazza to the door, which he opened with a pass key.

"I'll tell you one thing, though—I think the mysterious man, as you term him, *may* be a lead; so I'm going to call on the Rev. John Myrne in the morning and ask him a few questions. Maybe he saw the fellow with some distinctness, as the moonlight is unusually bright to-night."

They entered the rich mosaic-decorated hall. Margot held out her hand.

"Good night, Owen. Do you think Colonel and Mrs. Badger acquitted themselves creditably?"

He laughed amusedly. "I rather fancy we made a real hit. See if we don't receive half a dozen invitations in the next few days. These people think we're about twice as rich as they are, and that's what they like about us. Money is its own god, you know. Good night, Margot—pleasant dreams."

Margot ascended the broad terra-cotta flagstone stairs. Vaughn went back to the cool, fountain-lulled patio to smoke and think over the case.

CHAPTER V.

MARGOT'S GARDEN FETE.

THE next morning that hale and hearty Wyoming millionaire stockman, Colonel Judson Badger, took a bit of a run in his nifty roadster down to the other end of Kensington Park, to make a call on the Rev. John Myrne. As he had half expected, he found him at his favorite exercise of chopping wood.

The colonel, leaping from his car agilely, extended a hand and a smile—both of which were irresistible—and introduced himself with picturesque breeziness, stating he had been at Orme's dinner-party last night, and that, moreover, he had not been the least disappointed of the guests over the fact that the young clergyman came so late and remained such a few minutes.

"I'm interested in church work," he said unblushingly. "By the way, that was an odd little adventure you had. How is your wrist?"

Myrne smiled and held up his arm, showing a small square of plaster. "That's all there is to it. Come, Colonel Badger, we'll go into the house. It's rather warm out here."

The colonel hesitated. "Fine elm you've been cutting up," he said. "Too bad a forest monarch like that has to come down. Somebody making a clearing to build, I suppose?"

Myrne nodded, wiping the perspiration from his brawny arms and pulling down his

shirt-sleeves. The colonel looked at the pile of cut blocks approvingly. "You're an expert, Mr. Myrne. I never saw smoother work—why, it's almost mathematical!"

Myrne laughed. "Don't give the credit to me—the ax deserves it. I don't believe there ever was another such blade as that. I have two others like it, but this one is in a class by itself."

"Dutch," commented Vaughn, picking it up and noticing the trade-mark.

"As Dutch as the Zuyder Zee," replied Myrne. "It was given me—along with the others—by Mrs. Van Pruyn, widow of the man who originally owned Kensington Park, Derrick Van Pruyn. Mr. Van Pruyn himself was an enthusiastic wood-chopper; like Gladstone, he declared it to be the best of exercise. He had plenty of timber to work on, as the park was one vast forest."

They went into the attractive little rectory, and Myrne ushered Vaughn into a quaint, old wainscoted room with diamond-paned windows. Pictures of woodland scenes hung over the well-filled bookcases, and trophies of college sports were everywhere.

On a table were several prize cups—presumably won by Myrne himself; and above in a neat glass case were two small axes which looked as though they had never been used. Quite informally Vaughn went and examined them. They bore the same trade-mark as the other one.

"You take good care of them," smiled the detective. "In this case they remind me of the emergency axes on passenger-trains."

"I think they're the only ones of the kind in New York—perhaps that's why I value them." Myrne laughed boyishly as he looked about the room. "This place goes by the name of study—but it's really a den. You'll have to excuse the incongruity. Sit down, Colonel Badger. What can I do for you?"

First of all the colonel wrote him a check for one hundred dollars. "Pew rent for Mrs. Badger and myself while we're here. It won't be very long—not more than a month at most; and I can't promise to attend divine service, at that, but—well, we want a pew, anyway."

John Myrne was frankly astonished—and still more frankly pleased. "I wish our Kensington Park millionaires were more like you!" he exclaimed ingenuously. "What a corking good time I'd have of it running St. George's!"

"Come out to Wyoming and establish a church," suggested the colonel, with his genial smile.

"No, I couldn't do that; I'm tied here—"

"At St. George's, you mean?"

"Oh, no—St. George's is just a side line, so to speak. My main work—my real work—" He paused and bit his lip.

There might have been an awkward silence had not Vaughn deftly changed the subject, and then chatted on in a rather verbose, apparently aimless sort of way. He began speaking of the West and Westerners—plunged back into the early days—recalled some of the stirring gun-fights of that picturesque period—and thus very gradually led up to the episode of last night.

"What do you think the fellow was up to?" he queried.

"Oh, simply reconnoitering for a burglarious visit later in the night, or"—with a sudden laugh—"maybe he was just getting ready to serenade the cook! Perhaps I was a bit hasty in firing to scare the man. If he had seen me firing in the air, I dare say he wouldn't have shot back; but I was in shadow. His hitting me at all was purely accidental, I am convinced. I suppose I would have minded my own business better if he had been skulking around any other house—" He caught himself and blushed.

Vaughn smiled. "I understand. You wouldn't be able to identify him?"

"Oh, no—he was too far away; and then, you know, it wasn't daylight—"

"Certainly; but the moonlight was brilliant, and I fancied you might have noticed something about him, some mark, some peculiarity of clothes or of gait—" Myrne began to look rather surprised at so much court-room quizzing; but Vaughan had a ready explanation.

"Here's the idea," he said. "I'm pretty well fixed with this world's goods, and naturally, no matter where I go, my mode of

life makes it impossible to hide the fact. Burglars and hold-ups are always after me. So I thought maybe our friend the skulker was planning a midnight call on me, but had got mixed in the houses."

"I see," answered Myrne, with an amused smile. "Well, the only thing I noticed about him was a peculiar bundled-up appearance about the neck—which, now that I think of it, was a bit odd, considering the sweltering heat of the night; and of course he wore the regulation slouch-hat pulled low over his face."

Vaughn was delighted. This mark of identity, meager though it was, was more than he had expected. He prolonged his visit five or ten minutes, then, promising to be at church next Sunday if possible, took his leave. Myrne, evidently very favorably impressed by the Westerner, invited him to come and see him often.

"Come and try my Dutch axes," he laughed.

Colonel Judson Badger looked dubious. "I'm afraid wood-chopping isn't exactly my forte; but maybe I'll take you up on it some of these days, anyway!"

A week passed. Colonel and Mrs. Badger attended a number of very swagger dinners given in their honor by the Kensington Park colonists; and Margot had already sent out invitations for a nocturnal garden-party, which of course was to be an extremely *recherché* affair—as she informed the colonel, describing it with her favorite French adjectives. Every night, after the rising of the moon, McSurely had kept vigilant watch for the mysterious skulker; but the fellow did not reappear—at least on Claire Trevor's lawn, which was directly opposite the Moorish house, or in the street in front.

During the week Vaughn sent McSurely to the office several times to keep tab on matters there. Mac brought back a frightened, half-hysterical letter from Bettina Van Pruyn, begging the detective in the name of her "breaking heart and overwrought nerves" to speed up his activity in the case. Peyton had also telephoned once or twice, and had seemed much disappointed at not connecting with Vaughn.

"Owen, you ought to have a client like

mine—Jimmie Scarborough,” and Margot laughed. “He goes away for a month and leaves everything to me—no phone calls—no letters—just blessed freedom from foolish, nerve-racking questions!”

“Miss Claire Trevor is just as admirable a client,” was the quick answer. “I haven’t had a word from her—and notwithstanding the episode of the skulker, which most young women in her position would have hysterically connected with the blackmailers.”

Vaughn telephoned reassuringly to both Mrs. Van Pruyn and Peyton, declaring he had hopes of soon putting the finishing stroke to the case and confidently predicting no further attempts at blackmail for the present; meanwhile he would thank them for troubling him as little as possible, as he was away from the office practically all the time.

But Bettina Van Pruyn would not let him off as easily as this. “*Don’t* you think that man was the blackmailer?” she queried tremulously over the wire. “Oh, to think—”

“What if he was?” interposed Vaughn rather impatiently. “He wasn’t seen skulking around *your* house, was he?”

“That’s a perfect inspiration!” came the delighted cry. “Oh, Mr. Vaughn, thank you, thank you! Maybe he’s going to blackmail the lady near whose house he was seen—Miss Trevor! That would be lovely—”

“Why so?” asked Vaughn, amused at her naïveté.

She lowered her tones. “Shall I be absurdly frank? I’ll play you’re my father confessor. She’s trying to steal the man I love! Now don’t you understand?”

Vaughn gave a short laugh. “Well, Mrs. Van Pruyn, I’ll have to say good-by—”

“Just a moment, dear Mr. Vaughn! Why don’t you come out to Kensington and investigate? Don’t you want to look at the *rock* under which I placed the money? Didn’t *Sherlock Holmes* always have to *see* everything—”

“My dear Mrs. Van Pruyn, what is interesting in books isn’t always necessary in real life! But don’t worry—I’ll be out some of these days. Good-by.”

The evening of Margot’s garden fête came at last. Though there was no moon, the night was an ideal one in other respects. A soft breeze blew, setting in gentle motion the hundreds of Japanese lanterns with which the grounds were illuminated; and the superb appointments of the party made it distinctly the one *à fresco* event of the season. Everybody was there—the beautiful Claire Trevor; Orme, with eyes ever upon her; Mrs. Van Pruyn, with gaze always on him; Romney Peyton, who had met the rich Colonel Badger at a dinner and who wanted to initiate him into the mysteries of Wall Street; John Myrne, a magnificent specimen of a man in his dress suit; and dozens of others.

The young minister came late, and the moment he appeared Orme’s mood changed from a rather offensive jocularly to snarling moroseness. Claire Trevor made no secret of her preference; and once or twice Orme barely escaped insulting Myrne openly. The latter maintained his composure admirably, only a slight reddening of his sunburnt cheeks betraying any feeling. Vaughn, watching the two, thought grimly of what havoc the athletic clergyman would wreak on the dissipated millionaire if he ever got tuned up to it.

With the gaiety at its height, and everybody gathered around the buffet in one last onslaught on the good things (the rather strong punch—“Cheyenne Mix,” the genial host insisted on calling it—had gone to more than one head), Colonel Badger suddenly raised his glass and proposed a toast to—Broadway!

The guests drank with gusto. Dear old, gay old Broadway! Who wasn’t glad to drink to the old lane?

But there was one half-jesting objection—after the glasses had been drained.

“Broadway!” cried Mrs. Badger, with mock tragi-comedy, yet with an apparent undercurrent of seriousness. “That awful street! Colonel Badger, I know what your toast portends—you’re going to have what you call your fling!”

“Exactly, Mrs. Badger,” agreed the colonel jocosely. “What is Kensington Park but a monastery—and this Moorish dwelling but a cloister? Enough of tedium,

say I! To-morrow night I'm going to run into town and 'do' dear old Broadway!"

A shout of mirth greeted his merry defiance. Margot held up her hand in solemn warning.

"Beware of the blackmailers! Don't provide them a handle!"

The laughter died down. There were only a few faint titters; and in a moment these, too, ceased. *Blackmail!* The sinister word had cast a sort of hypnosis on the crowd. Eye sought eye; pulse quickened to pulse—

"Nonsense, my dear!" burst out Colonel Badger, with his uproarious Wyoming laugh. "I'm not afraid of the blackmailing gentry, even if you are!"

And so the cloud lifted, the spell was broken. And after a while the good nights were said and the merrymakers went home, only two of the entire number looking sullenly unhappy—Orme, because Claire Trevor had preferred to look at the reverend wood-chopper; and poor Bettina Van Pruyn, because Orme had preferred to look at Claire. How impishly ironical is love!

"Well, Owen, what do you think now?" queried Margot, after the last of the revelers had left. "Or are you still refusing to think?"

He chuckled. "No, child. I'm beginning to think at last, but—"

She pouted. "Of course that 'but' means you won't tell me just what you're thinking—"

"But I don't know 'just what' I'm thinking myself. Everything in my mind is chaos—almost. There's just one thing I feel sure of. The little '*affaire scandaleuse*'—to use a bit of your favorite French—of to-morrow night is going to work. The 'plant' will accomplish its purpose. *Somebody* will follow me and take notes—and day after to-morrow the blackmailer will make his demands."

Margot studied a moment.

"That means, of course, you think one of our guests to-night is the guilty party—"

"Why so?"

"Because only our guests heard you say you'd give the blackmailers their chance to-morrow night—"

He laughed amusedly. "But our friend

the mysterious skulker may have heard me also—from behind a bush or tree, for instance."

"Owen, you're making fun of me. But I'm willing to hazard one prophecy—you'll find this man to be in the employ of the real blackmailer, said blackmailer having attended our garden fête to-night."

He nodded gravely. "A good bet, Margot. And it won't be long till we have him."

CHAPTER VI.

"THE SCAR."

EARLY next morning McSurely, having been instructed by Vaughn down to the most trifling detail, drove into town to arrange the "scandal plant." For fear of being followed by agents of the blackmailers, he left the car at a downtown garage and then took the subway to his lodging, where he donned a disguise. Then, defying recognition, he sallied out to fix things for the "chief."

Late in the afternoon he returned to Kensington Park—in *propria persona*, of course—and immediately went into star chamber session with Vaughn. They knocked heads for an hour or more, and when the confab was finished both were smiling—but the chief's smile was the broader.

"Mac," he cried delightedly, "you're a jewel. You've manufactured the machinery, oiled it, and set it in motion. It only remains for me to get aboard and ride to success. But you're sure Mlle. Sil-Vou—What's her name, anyway?"

"*Sil-Vous-Plait* — Mlle. Sil-Vous-Plait, pronounced Si-Voo-Play. *Sil-Vous-Plait* means 'If You Please.' *Mademoiselle* took it because she is so good-hearted—she wants to please everybody—see, *mon-sieur*?"

"Yes," laughed Vaughn. "Mlle. Sil-Vous-Plait must be a regular Little Sister to the whole wide world to have adopted such a touching name as that. But she understands conditions thoroughly?"

"Sure."

"She knows it's a 'plant'? She won't want to blackmail me herself?"

McSurely roared. "Of course not. She knows it's just a set-up. Besides, she's a good girl—and is doing this for *me*, you understand, lots more than for the money. She's a friend of mine—a lady if there ever was one! Trust her, chief; she'll not play you false."

"All right, Mac; I'll take your word for it."

At eight o'clock Colonel Judson Badger, gorgeous in a white silk suit, fancy-ribbed Panama hat, pongee shirt, and suede oxfords, was ready for his spin into town to dazzle Broadway. Margot, shaking with suppressed laughter, stood on the piazza and watched him enter the car. He threw her a spectacular kiss as he sped away.

Vaughn felt certain the blackmailer's agent—whoever the agent might be—would follow him almost from his very door into the city, and then, at a safe distance, dog his footsteps until he had seen what he had been told to look for. The pursuer himself had to be pursued, watched, spied on, even as he had prepared to spy on Vaughn; he had to be trailed to his lair. McSurely was the man for this job, and he was primed for it. He was waiting in Vaughn's little roadster half a block from the main Kensington Park driveway, just inside the big gate. He and Vaughn had agreed that the blackmailer's man would perhaps wait in the deep shadows of a line of giant oaks a couple of blocks beyond the gateway in the direction of the city. After Vaughn's car had passed he would dart out—in a car of his own, of course—and begin the pursuit. McSurely meanwhile would be on the watch from his vantage inside the park gateway—there would still be considerable daylight at eight o'clock—and at the pursuing car's appearance, pursuing car number two would enter the chase.

It began according to Hoyle. Vaughn's car passed the line of oaks and had gone barely two blocks when an insignificant little roadster dashed out from the shadows and followed. Vaughn, gazing back through the twilight, saw it distinctly. He knew the hawk-eyed McSurely was already on the job—so the pursuit was on. Leaning back luxuriously against the cushions, he indulged in one of his Wyoming laughs.

He made a quick run into town—but not too quick to outdistance the little roadster—he was careful as to that. At the Washington Arch in Washington Square he alighted from the car, ordered the chauffeur to wait in the immediate vicinity until his return, hailed a taxi and then drove slowly to the heart of New York's Bohemia, Sheridan Square, where dozens of freakish—and innocent-looking—little tea rooms and gift shops on first floors, second floors, in cellars and in attics lure the green provincial and the sophisticated Manhattanite alike. In front of a ramshackle frame building the cab stopped. Before alighting Vaughn turned and glanced down the street. Was the humble little roadster following? Yes—crossing under the "L" tracks on Sixth Avenue; and a moment later McSurely came bowling up behind. Vaughn chuckled. Smooth work!

The ramshackle building had a tumble-down entry plastered with showcard advertisements of tea rooms and other Bohemian lounging places upstairs. The largest of these cards announced that "Mademoiselle Sil-Vous-Plait, Little Sister to the Wide, Wide World," was prepared to serve "tea, French pastry, and other delicacies to soul-hungry humans at moderate prices, smiles gratis, third floor rear, across the chasm." It was a rather befuddling sign, and for a moment Vaughn hesitated. Then he hurried up two flights of lantern-lighted stairs, crossed a narrow court on a shaky little bridge, knocked at a door on which was printed "Here's Mademoiselle," and in a moment entered a silhouette-decorated room full of tête-à-tête tables and shook hands with the lady herself.

Mademoiselle Sil-Vous-Plait, though she called herself a little sister, was a monstrosously big one; she must have been six feet one, if an inch. She had an aureole of yellow hair, a good-humored, rather handsome face of startling dimensions, and a flashy smile of corresponding expansiveness. Her raiment was gorgeous and distinctly unconventional in its conglomerate color scheme. A little box-turban had already been planked on her flaxen mop of hair, and she was putting on her gloves.

"Mademoiselle Sil-Vous-Plait under-

stands?" queried Vaughn pointedly at the outset.

"*Oui, monsieur.* That eternal friend of mine, M. Michael McSurely, told me it's to be a 'plant'—a 'frame'—what you call it, *oui*? Of course he didn't say what's to be planted or who's to be framed! Don't worry, *monsieur.* I can act like a Bernhardt and keep a secret like a woman who's never been told one. It will be just a lark!"

Vaughn smiled. Mademoiselle If-You-Please's straight English was so much better than her attempts at the broken articles. Mademoiselle had a ready explanation.

"To tell you the truth, *monsieur*, I have forgotten all the French I never knew! M. McSurely's parents and me own both was afther comin' from the same blissed county in the Ould Sod! Seriously, my French is purely decorative—a linguistic efflorescence—is that grammar?—intended to bring the biz to my little tea room." She chuckled. "Who doesn't love an Irish lass who's also French?"

Vaughn laughed and handed her a bank-note. "Put it in the business, *mademoiselle*—"

"Ah, *monsieur* is too good! All this? I'll buy some new teapots and have Anton the anarchist artist paint some new silhouettes on the walls."

They crossed the "chasm" and plunged down the two flights of stairs to the waiting taxi. Vaughn flashed his gaze around. The roadster was waiting on the other side of the square in front of a Bohemian café. McSurely was not in sight—but was hanging round just the same!

Vaughn ordered the cabby to make directly for the white lights up at Times Square; and he and Mademoiselle Sil-Vous-Plait had a more or less Hooverized dinner at a rather speedy café, ending with a bottle of the fizzy stuff. He had been careful to choose a restaurant that had windows opening on the street; and still more carefully he had picked out a table at one of the windows. Only a thin lace gauze, embroidered in the center with the monogram of the place, was stretched across the pane; and any one on the outside could see inside distinctly. Vaughn's attitude toward *mademoiselle* was one of semimaudlin tender-

ness. He smiled at her, winked, whispered, patted her hand, almost touched chins across the table; and when the waiter stood in immobile majesty to wrap her in her billowy summer wrap, her foolish old "sweetheart" snatched it from him and tucked her into it himself.

"All for the good of the cause," laughed Vaughn to himself, glancing covertly through the window.

The taxi next took them to a certain hotel that was not noted for its slowness. The office was a lounging place for both sexes, and Vaughn had Mademoiselle Sil-Vous-Plait wait on one of the red-satin divans while he approached the desk and parleyed with the clerk for just the sort of room he wanted. He took care to prolong the talk so as to give the blackmailer's agent time to pull up outside and see what was going on. Then, registering "Ralph Williams and wife, Chicago," he took the tin-tagged key, held it up ostentatiously, beckoned to *mademoiselle*, and they entered the elevator—and shot up to the roof garden, where for a couple of perfectly innocent hours they managed to live through a very stupid cabaret show staged in a "grove" of patriotic "trees" that dangled red, white and blue blossoms.

Dropping to the office again, Vaughn took the key—still holding it up with a sort of perverse defiance so that all the world might see—went to the desk, paid his bill, then, twining his arm lovingly about *mademoiselle's*, escorted her out. The doorman called the cab number, the car drew up, and they tumbled in.

"If all evenings were as innocent as this one, *monsieur*, what a good world this would be, *n'est-ce-pas*?" sighed *mademoiselle*, leaning back on the frayed upholstery.

Vaughn took the lady to her Sheridan Square rookery and bade her a grateful good night, then drove to Washington Square, dismissed the taxi, entered his own waiting car and sped out to Kensington Park—and thus the "plant" had been planted, the trap had been set.

Now what would the game be?

The clock was pointing to the small hours, but Vaughn was too full of the case to go to bed. So he went to the *patio* to

have a meditative smoke and await McCurely's return.

Mac was not long in coming. The little wrinkles around his blue eyes were puckered more than usual, and his omnipresent smile dug new depths in his chubby cheeks—always signs of triumphant success. Vaughn offered him a cigar and pointed to the wicker easy chair already drawn up beside his own.

"Well, Mac?"

"Everything's all right; it was just like giving a hungry kid pie. The fellow fell into the trap—simply ate it up. Talk about 'plants'! This one was the classic. Mademoiselle Sil-Vous-Plait carried around plenty of *éclat*, eh? Nice little Parisienne she! I tell you——"

"Come, man," broke in Vaughn impatiently, "forget Sil-Vous-Plait! Describe the man."

Mac grinned. "Bundled-up appearance about the neck——"

"What! The mysterious skulker? Go on."

"Hat pulled down over his face—could not see much of it, as his chin almost reached the brim—but what little I saw was high class——"

"High class?"

"In a freakish sort of way—sort of *à la* the philosophical anarchist—radical poet——"

"Poet?"

"You know what I mean, chief—the breed that does a lot of fool reading and a bigger lot of fool thinking and then goes crazy over the woes of humanity in general and the fate of the under dog in particular—you know the sort. He was fairly well dressed, and knew how to nose around without taking the center of the stage."

"He did everything that was required of him?"

"Like a little man. Peered through the café windows—saw you go daffy over the divine Sil-Vous-Plait—followed you to the hotel—boldly sailed up to the register after you had gone upstairs—took a look at the 'Ralph Williams and wife, Chicago'—waited till you came out—followed you to Washington Square—and then I traced him down to a Bowery lodging house."

"Bowery lodging house! Rather queer

hole for an animal of that stripe to hie to. You're sure, Mac?"

"Sure I'm sure! Don't you think I know the Bowery from Fifth Avenue? Big rookery of a place down near Chatham Square—undergoing alterations. The under-dogger went in with a regular home—again air. Here's the number."

Vaughn looked at the card absently. "You didn't follow him in?"

Mac smiled. "My orders were 'to'—not 'into'—to the door, not beyond! I guess you were reserving the rest for your own special gunning, eh, chief?"

"You're right, Mac," laughed Vaughn. "I rather fancy I'll invade the Bowery lodging house myself. Our friend must be a rather interesting fellow, from your description." He yawned and rose. "The bed for mine—some hard work ahead. Good night, Mac."

"Pleasant dreams—of Mademoiselle Sil-Vous-Plait!" Mac flung after him.

"I can't dream in French," was the counter. "You'd better be hitting the pillows yourself."

In the middle of the afternoon Vaughn took the train to town, went to a costumer friend of his and disguised himself as a typical Bowery bum and then made straight for the lodging house where Mac had traced the blackmailer's agent. Carpenters were busily at work on the lower floor making extensive alterations. Vaughn ascended the stairs, which looked oddly clean for a rookery of this character, and found himself in a sort of office which had evidently been improvised to be used only temporarily, as the desk and tables were made of rough, unpainted planking. A number of shabbily clad men were sitting about, reading papers, dozing, or idly watching the "L" trains rush by. Nobody was at the desk.

Vaughn went to it and rang an old-fashioned country dinner-bell which he found there. Immediately a man came toward him from a partitioned space in the rear—the mysterious skulker, the automobilist who had shadowed him last night. His neck was no longer bundled up, the collarless shirt revealing an ugly, livid scar across the throat. He seemed to be slightly

past middle age; his build was powerful, his hair streaked with gray, his face a splendid wreck of one, seamed, scarred, and lit with the hard, brilliant eyes of fanatic or madman.

But he smiled on the woful bum with infinite gentleness.

"Well, brother," he said, taking Vaughn's artificially soiled hand, "what's the trouble?"

"Are you in charge of this place?"

"Yes; I'm the acting superintendent." He flashed his piercing gaze on the shabby figure, then quickly jerked up the hand, which despite its almost glove like covering of dirt showed absolutely no evidences of toil. It was the hand of a professional man, a brain worker; and the "acting superintendent" with a contemptuous exclamation threw it down.

"Rich once upon a time, eh?" he snarled. "A parasite, living off the toil of others! And now having spent your ill-gotten gains you're down and out and come to me for help!"

"You're assuming a good deal," rejoined Vaughn quietly. "How do you know I was ever wealthy?"

"Oh, I know the breed—would-be soft hands, would-be soft voice, would-be soft words! All softness! That's just it. If you ever had known the hellish hardness of poverty—"

"Say, who's the boss here?" cut in the bum rather belligerently.

"Didn't I tell you I'm the acting superintendent?" came the growl.

"Well, Mr. Acting Supe, who's the real superintendent, the one who's sitting back taking his ease, the head man? He's the fellow I want to see. I want to tell him I haven't had a square meal in such a long time he'd think I was lying if I told him. I want to tell him I'm sick and tired of Chatham Square and the Cooper Square park benches. I want to tell him I'm down and out and that I am hunting hell's exit. I want to tell him finally that I've always been a poor devil and a hard worker—a regular slave of the 'plutes' and exploiters—but because the work didn't happen to be the sort that spreads your fingers, callouses your palms and horns your knuckles, you

tell me to my face I'm a has-been plutocrat and show me the door!"

During this outburst the man with the scarred neck had shown a decreasing distrust and an increasing enthusiasm that was a study in lightning-change psychology. Vaughn's subtle lapse from the speech and manner of an educated man into the subdued swagger of the penniless street loafer had a miraculous effect on the hater of wealth. He seized the dirty hand—the same hand he had so scornfully thrown from him—and shook it warmly.

"Clever little game you played on me," he laughed, "making me think you'd once been a non-producing parasite. Almighty good acting! I've got a bunk for you, my man, a good hot bath, and a ticket for supper at the restaurant across the street. We are not serving meals yet—we're in the midst of alterations, as you can see. When they're completed we'll have one of the best eating houses on the Bowery. It will take up the entire lower floor." He talked on for some minutes, his enthusiasm mounting higher and higher. It was plain his life was bound up in his work.

"What's your special grudge against the rich?" queried Vaughn curiously.

Instantly the man's face became disfigured with hate. "What's my grudge against the rich? Take all the grudges that have ever been felt in this injustice-cursed world since the time of Adam and roll them into one—that's my grudge against the rich! My hate for the pirates of privilege is so strong that it makes all other hatreds seem as love in comparison." His eyes glittered wildly; his cheeks flushed to purple. Several of the loungers turned from their dozing contemplation of the "L" trains to look at him. "See this scar?" he continued rapidly, pointing to the livid mark across his neck. "I got that in a strike. I was the foreman of the factory—I sided with the men—the owners hired a couple of thugs to despatch me. They resorted to a good old-fashioned razor—left me for dead—but I was like the cat, they couldn't kill me!" He laughed hoarsely. "That's just *one* reason why I hate the predatory rich—there are a thousand more."

"And the boss—" began Vaughn.

"The boss! Curse him!" He clenched his fist. "He—"

"I mean the boss of this hotel."

"Oh, I see!" The fierce eyes softened and a gentle smile lighted the wreckage of his face. "*He's* a different sort of boss—the best in the world—the sort of boss I'd be willing to work for all my life. He's a lover of humanity—like me; only he doesn't hate the slave drivers to the extent I do. So I have to curb my speech a bit when he's around. He wouldn't stand for such plain talk—but he'll have to come to it sooner or later! No, my man, you can't see him to-day; he's not in town. You'll have to wait till to-morrow—and maybe you can't see him even then. Meanwhile how about that hot bath?"

Vaughn grinned. "If it's just the same to you, I'll tackle the eats first. Is that meal ticket handy?"

The acting superintendent laughed. "I can't blame you for wanting the bath come second!" He went behind the desk, took a ticket from a shelf, punched it and placed it in the outstretched hand. "Across the street a few doors toward the corner. Give them this and tell them it's from the 'Scar'—that's me. They'll treat you right, the coffee's good, and they've got real meat in the stew. Wait! You'll come back for that bath?"

"Oh, sure."

"Good. The water is hot—and the bunk has sheets. Fill yourself full."

"Trust me for that," chuckled Vaughn. "So-long."

"So-long," said the Scar.

CHAPTER VII.

MYRNE SHOOTS AGAIN.

ON the first mail the next morning Col. Judson Badger, No. 113 Westlake Avenue, Kensington Park, Long Island, received the following anonymous letter, written in the same hand as the one sent to Philip Orme:

And so, colonel, you did Broadway, after all! Did it as only a Wyoming millionaire could do, too! But your wife wasn't along, *was* she? Hardly!

Where did you find the lady who *was* with you? *We know*. Where did you take her? *We know*. Who registered as "Ralph Williams and wife, Chicago"? *We know*. Now, colonel, don't you think it's worth your while to pay us to keep this knowledge to ourselves? Fancy how happy it would make your wife! Now listen, millionaire. We want fifty thousand dollars, and we want it right away. *Place that amount in the hollow tree at the end of the thicket to the north of the little church by midnight to-night at the latest*. Do this, and our lips are sealed forever. But if you attempt any funny business, if you bring the fool police in on this, if you try to trap our agent who will go after the money, you'll not only get your head blown off, but *we'll tell your wife the whole nasty story to-morrow*. There'll be a dozen of us hidden in various places near the tree. A word to the wise.

"What do you think of that, Margot?" laughed Vaughn. "Isn't it some screed?"

"It sounds like the projecting-jawed villain in a Third Avenue melodrama," she answered, smiling. "But it's not the real thing at that."

"Not the real thing? What do you mean?"

"Somebody who is *trying* to be fierce wrote those absurd threats."

Vaughn chuckled. "In other words, he wouldn't blow off my head at all?"

"Certainly not."

"And he wouldn't come to Mrs. Judson Badger with the 'nasty story' even if I refused to hand over the fifty thousand?"

"No. I think a coward has been playing this game all along—only his victims have been bigger cowards still."

Vaughn shook his head. "The Scar is no coward—even if the people behind him are. And I have serious doubts of that. No, Margot, our theories differ radically. You are of opinion the blackmailers are fools who are trying to make us think they are wise; my idea is they're wise men who are trying to appear as fools."

"Well, in any event you've got them. All you have to do is to be at the tree to-night and get the drop on the Scar."

Vaughn thought a moment. "It doesn't look as simple as all that to me—quite."

"Why not? You don't have to wait right at the tree—anywhere in the more, or less immediate proximity will do. This is a period of unusually clear weather, and the moon will be full around midnight."

"But what if I *were* to get the drop on the Scar? He'd never give his pals away—or rather, his employers. The man's a fanatic—he's doing this thing not for money but on account of his insane hatred of the rich. That kind of fellow would die with sealed lips."

Margot was beginning to see the difficulties of the case. "Well, what are you going to do?"

"I haven't decided—yet. But I'm working on a rather curious line of action."

An hour or so later Vaughn reconnoitered a bit in the vicinity of the tree. It was a half-dead elm standing somewhat apart from its more flourishing fellows. The hollow in the trunk was a good-sized one, beginning near the ground and reaching up several feet. It had a sharp turn in one place which hid a sort of natural shelf beyond—thus forming an ideal covert, protecting anything placed therein alike from the ravages of weather and the hazard of curious eyes. The only house in sight was the rectory, some two hundred yards away. Vaughn studied, then went to it and rang the doorbell.

A grim, elderly woman—evidently the housekeeper—answered the summons.

"Is Mr. Myrne in?"

"No, sir."

"Where can I see him?"

"I couldn't say."

"Where is he?"

"In New York."

"There's no place there where I'd be likely to run into him?"

"I couldn't say."

The extreme brevity of the old woman's answers did not seem to proceed from ill-humor. Vaughn judged her to be simply a person of few words.

"When will Mr. Myrne return?" he inquired.

"Six o'clock."

"Please tell him Colonel Badger will call around seven. Thank you—good day."

At seven o'clock that evening a bent, old man with gray hair and beard presented himself at the rectory. Myrne himself opened the door.

"I'm Colonel Badger," announced the visitor.

"Colonel Badger! Why are you rigged up like this?"

"Let me in," chuckled Vaughn.

Myrne led the way to his study, where the detective straightened his crooked back and took off the wig and whiskers, blossoming forth as the somewhat effervescent Colonel Judson Badger once more.

"No doubt, Mr. Myrne, you're wondering what's up. I didn't want to be seen entering your house—and it's still broad daylight, as you can see for yourself."

There was a pause. Each flashed a sharp glance at the other—then both smiled with rather forced nonchalance.

"Sit down, Colonel Badger," said Myrne politely.

But the colonel went to the window—taking care to stand behind the draperies. "One gets a fine view of that old hollow-trunk tree from here," he remarked casually. "Mr. Myrne, will you do me a favor?"

"If I can, certainly."

He wheeled around. "Will you let me sit at this window for a while—till midnight if necessary?"

The young minister's frank, handsome face showed blank surprise—nothing more. "Why, yes—"

"Let me explain. This morning I received a blackmailing letter—"

But now Myrne started violently and smothered an explanation. Then, mastering his agitation, he bade his visitor proceed.

Vaughn's smile was disarming. "The blackmailer demands that I deposit the trifling amount of fifty thousand dollars in that hollow tree by midnight at the latest. He threatens to blow my head off if I show myself. There's going to be a full moon to-night and I can get a fairly good view of the worthy from here—not of his face, of course; but any peculiarity of gait or of *clothing* would be more or less visible from this window. I disguised myself on coming here, fearing he might be hanging round even this early." The colonel smiled. "A rather odd favor to ask, and on such short acquaintance—but I'm welcome, Mr. Myrne?"

"Are you—are you going to meet the

blackmailer's demands?" Myrne asked hesitatingly.

"Pay out fifty thousand dollars? Hardly."

"Of course not. Have you notified the police?"

"No."

"Why not?"

Again eye met eye.

"Blackmailing is a dirty business, but it's not the worst crime in the world," answered the colonel gravely. "The present case, I fancy, will be found to have certain factors that will appeal to my sense of humanity. So I haven't brought in the police—yet."

"But—you may?"

"If necessary."

Myrne drew a long breath, strode to the window, then back again. "Colonel Badger—" He bit his lip.

"Yes, Mr. Myrne?"

He made a gesture as if impatient with himself for his reluctance to speak out, then drew back his head defiantly. "Colonel Badger, you're too tender-hearted. Blackmail is a serious, a dastardly crime. It not only bleeds its victims financially, but causes all kinds of mental torture—panic-stricken fears, agonies of suspense, that peculiar terror of an imminent doom hanging over one's head. You shouldn't temporize with it; you—" He broke off abruptly, his pale cheeks flushing, his eyes burning into Vaughn's. "Make yourself entirely at home," he said in low tones; then wheeled about and hurried from the room.

Vaughn gave an amazed whistle and dropped into a chair. What was the meaning of the clergyman's agitation? His guilt? Or knowledge of another's? *Guilt!* The detective started as he realized he was at last *directly* associating the idea with John Myrne. Until this moment he had wondered, suspected, doubted, suspected again; now— But even yet he could scarcely conceive of the possibility. Myrne's manly personality, his calling of a Christian minister, everything about him made the suspicion not only repugnant but absurd. Yet there were certain very strange facts that had to be explained.

His mysterious charities, the equally mysterious rich parishioner who made them possible and who shrank from publicity; Myrne's bitter feeling toward the rich—a feeling shared in an intensified degree by the Scar; the Scar's disinclination to tell the name of his "boss"; the fact that Myrne had championed the cause of strikers in a town up-State, and the further fact that the Scar had been in a strike himself in that part of the country—thus making highly probable the assumption that the two had met during this struggle of class against class and hence had begun to hate the rich together—what were all these things but links in a chain of evidence against the young clergyman? True, the mysterious shooting affray in the street near Orme's house on the night of the dinner party remained to be explained; but Myrne and the Scar had not recognized each other in the darkness, that was all.

Several hours went by. The sunset afterglow deepened into twilight, twilight into night; but with the going of the dusk the moon rose in a cloudless sky. There was an unwonted absence of humidity in the air, and objects on the moonlit landscape could be discerned with singular distinctness, the hollow-trunk tree standing out black and sinister against the copse behind it. Vaughn had drawn his chair close to the window and had gazed undeviatingly, but so far with no result. Absolute silence reigned in the house—a silence that seemed vaguely portentous. The detective, impressed by its uncanny quality, wondering why Myrne had not reappeared, what he had done, what he intended to do.

In the midst of these speculations the door opened suddenly and the elderly housekeeper, bearing a tea tray, made a dark silhouette against the hall light. Vaughn, startled, pushed back his chair from the window.

"Don't you want a light?" she asked abruptly.

"No, thank you. Please shut the door."

She closed the door and came forward, seeing her way easily in the moonlight streaming through the window. She put the tray on a small table and then drew it near Vaughn.

"Mr. Myrne thought you might like a cup of tea," she said briefly, starting toward the door again.

"Just a moment—"

She half turned. "Yes, sir?"

"Where is Mr. Myrne?"

"In his bedroom."

"And where is that?"

"The room next to this one." She nodded to the right.

"Thank you. That's all."

The light streamed in from the hall for an instant, then was shut off again—and Vaughn was alone.

A clock somewhere in the house chimed ten. Vaughn waited another hour. He was beginning to grow drowsy in spite of himself when he noticed with a start that the landscape had grown considerably darker. He looked up at the sky. A few vagrant clouds were passing over the moon. In a moment the luminary would be visible again. Vaughn felt a real thrill—his first of the night. What if the Scar had been waiting near by for just such an opportunity as this?

The moon came out from behind the cloud, showing a skulking figure with a bundled-up appearance about the neck hurrying toward the hollow-trunk tree. The next instant another figure darted across Vaughn's line of vision—Myrne! He had leaped from the bedroom window.

"Halt!" he cried in a hoarse, unnatural voice.

The skulking figure turned.

Vaughn sprang to his feet.

The moon disappeared behind another cloud. And now in the sudden pall of darkness two shots rang out. Then came another hoarse cry. What had happened? Which had been hit? Vaughn stood motionless, transfixed. He was half dazed by the totally unexpected turn events had taken. That cursed cloud! Would it never pass? But why stand here supinely? Coming to himself, he dropped out upon the ground, then hurried forward. As he neared the tree he dimly discerned two figures—one prostrate on the ground, the other bending above.

Vaughn reached them just as the moon came out. The one on the ground was the

Scar. The muffler had been torn from his neck exposing the livid mark that gave him his nickname. Blood was flowing from a hole in his chest. His face looked ghastly in the moonlight; he lay perfectly still.

"Dead?" queried the detective.

Myrne did not answer. With fixed, fascinated gaze he was gazing down at the man he had shot. His pistol was still clutched in his hand. Another—the Scar's—lay on the ground near.

Vaughn bent over the motionless figure. The Scar was dead.

"Chance shot," said the detective laconically. "You couldn't take aim in the dark. You're not to blame."

Still Myrne did not move or speak. He seemed entirely oblivious of the other's presence.

Vaughn took the pistol from his unresisting fingers and put it in his own pocket; then he picked up the Scar's and placed it in the dead man's hand. The fingers, while rigid, looked as though they had just released their hold on the weapon. Vaughn then went through the Scar's pockets; but there were no letters, cards, or other marks of identification.

"The poor fellow committed suicide," he said quietly.

Myrne stirred at last and looked up. "What?" he muttered blankly.

"The Scar has killed himself. Come, we'll go back to the house." He put his arm under Myrne's shoulder to help him up.

Myrne shook his head. "No. He didn't commit suicide. I killed him—killed the Scar. Think of it—the Scar, of all men! I didn't know—I couldn't see in the dark. He wouldn't halt when I commanded. I shot to scare him. Oh, what have I done?" He bowed his face on his hands. "And he knew me—he recognized me before he died! And he said—O God, what *did* he say? *That name!* Did he speak it? Am I just imagining it?"

"Come," said Vaughn with quiet authority. "He killed himself. There's his pistol. Where's yours? Don't you see you have none? Come."

Myrne looked — comprehending at last. He drew a long breath, then rose. "But we

can't leave him here. Hadn't we better—" He looked toward the house.

"No. I'll telephone the police. They'll remove the body. Everything will be all right. Come."

Docilely, trembling, still half dazed, Myrne gave a last, shuddering look at the Scar, then went with Vaughn.

The housekeeper, who had gone to bed and been awakened by the shots, met them at the door. Vaughn briefly explained that he and Myrne, on hearing the reports, had hurried out and found a strange man dying. Beyond question it was case of suicide.

He led Myrne into the study and then returned to the hall, where he telephoned to the Grassmere police station. Lowering his tones, he queried:

"Captain of police—Grassmere?"

"Yes."

"This is Owen Vaughn—Vaughn, the detective. You know me?"

"Sure, sure, Mr. Vaughn!"

"Listen. I'm at St. George's Rectory at Kensington Park. There's a dead man lying near the road to the left of the house. I heard a shot a few minutes ago, ran out, and found a corpse—likely a suicide. His gun in his hand, the position of the body, everything points to that. You know the place, captain?"

"Sure. We'll be along in no time. Thank you, Mr. Vaughn."

"Not at all. Good-by."

In ten minutes the police car pulled up near the rectory. Vaughn went out, briefly explained his disguise by stating he was working on a case, which of course he did not specify, and then repeated his phone talk about finding the Scar's body, *et cetera*, amplifying the story but little. In five minutes more the dead man had been removed.

When Vaughn returned to the study he found Myrne seated by the window, staring out into the darkness. The moon had gone down. Vaughn turned on the light and lowered the curtain. The young clergyman looked up with a start.

"How do you feel?" queried the detective considerably.

"I don't know—yet."

"Don't worry; trust everything to me."

Myrne sprang up excitedly. "But I *can't* trust everything to you—I can't even tell you what's on my mind."

"Why not?"

"Because—" He caught himself, then gazed at Vaughn steadfastly. "How long had you been standing out there before you spoke to me?"

"Only a moment."

"You didn't hear the Scar—say anything?"

"No; he had already died."

"Thank God!" He paused. "It's gone—the body? The police—"

"Yes; everything's all right."

He drew a breath of relief. "I've been in such a daze I didn't know what was happening."

"I'll have to be going now," said Vaughn. "But I'll be back some time during the day."

"Why not spend the rest of the night here? There's an extra room—"

Vaughn smiled and shook his head. "Couldn't think of it. Mrs. Badger would worry herself to death."

Myrne accompanied him to the door and shook his hand warmly. "How can I ever thank you?"

"Don't try, my dear fellow. But if you really want to please me—go straight to bed! Good night."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

A NEW MYSTERY BY THE MASTER OF MYSTERIES

TWENTY-SIX CLUES

By ISABEL OSTRANDER, Author of "Suspense," "Between Heaven and Earth," etc.

BEGINS IN NEXT WEEK'S ALL-STORY



Attar of Roses

by George Gilbert

IN the fragrant twilight, under the largest arch of the Bazaar of Nazimpur, I first saw Firghiz Khan. Fat, urbane, with black beard that rippled as he stroked it, he sat on his warm-toned mat of finely woven silken pile, and his black eyes glittered or smiled as he willed. I saw he was a Persian, free from outcross.

He was plainly honored when, after making some small purchases — spiced rose leaves, gingered citron, a tiny vial of *attar* — I accepted his invitation to pass around the end of the piled up stuffs on the trestle that served him as counter, and sit with him. I knew a little Arabic, he some English; each was fair in making and reading signs, deciphering the meaning of expressions on the other's face.

Firghiz Khan clapped his hands softly. Bare feet shuffled and a young man, in a blue robe, came in with coffee, sweets, hubbly-bubbly charged with tawny Merkhass tobacco of luscious quality. As the servant waited I noted his flashing smile that showed perfect teeth, the Cupid's bow his mouth made, the curl of his hair, the whiteness of his brow, the healthy tint of his cheeks, the supple grace with which he moved. When he had gone, I spoke of the man's singular beauty to my host.

"He is a pretty fellow," he agreed, puffing great clouds of incense to Lady Nicotina; "he came to me six months ago, pleading that he be permitted to learn the

ways of the trade here under me at a nominal wage. He does everything well, is punctual, quiet. A pearl of a servant, and even condescends to wait on me when a customer is to be served with me to refreshments."

"You are fortunate," I concluded.

"The *attar* you selected," he queried, "did you take it from choice or by chance?"

"From choice; I know good Vale of the Peri *attar* when it is placed under my nose. I always want good *attar* for my clients."

"Come!" and he uncrossed his legs and stood up, and I too left my rug. His tawny Bazdrah robe gleamed as its ripples caught the rays from the lamps with their wicks floating in scented oil. All about us heaped-up goods, curious, wondrous in their charming hues, called for admiration.

"As you know so much of *attars*," he went on, "come back under the arch. This is not only my shop but my house. I have an alcove behind the hangings, with a niche in it for Ali Beg, my apprentice—and my 'family' finds room also. I have in there a jar of *attar* that will interest you."

With stately tread he went to the hangings, swept them aside. As he did so I thought I heard the sound of a faint scuffling and perhaps a tiny ripple of laughter — girlish laughter.

Before we could pass the hangings Ali Beg appeared from beyond.

"What is wanted, effendi?" he asked in gray, level tones.

"That you watch the shop for a few moments," and we passed in as Ali went out.

It was more than an alcove under the arch. It was a high-vaulted room, the ceiling of minor-toned plastic designs, wreathed to form texts from the Al Koran. At the peak of it glowed a lamp that cast rose-red rays on the brown-red rugs, the shimmering silken wall coverings, the cushions, the tumbled *divan*. In the center of the room stood a great jar, five feet tall, thick in proportion, made of an alabasterlike porcelain all but transparent, more than translucent. A Benares lamp of hand-hammered brass glowed back of it, and the light from it, illumining the giant jar, shone through and through it, as if it had been a giant lambent pearl or the incasing chrysalis of a nariad's soul. The white tiles there were bare.

"Come!" invited my host, going to the great jar. He lifted the tightly fitting lid from it, and to my nostrils there came the overpowering yet deliciously pleasant scent of *attar* of the rarest. The jar had been sealed once; but the broken wax was very old.

"Pure Shimmer of Gold," affirmed Firghiz Khan, stroking his rippling beard with his right hand, on the ring-finger of which gleamed a sapphire of most benign ray, with a seal—a Persian letter or two—carved on it.

"Shimmer of Gold!"

He had named an *attar* from farthest Kardeshuai, every drop of which was worth a golden coin.

"As I have said. But not for sale—now, most bountiful."

The odor told me he was not deceiving me. I had a few drops of that *attar* bought of a camel driver, who had smuggled it out in a hollow ear-ornament and sold it to me under pledge of secrecy. And here was a simple bazaar merchant who had gallons of it!

"Year by year I have put my profits into this *attar*," he explained; "you see all my fortune. One day perhaps I shall sell half of it, keep the other half to solace my old

age, to rub on my beard, my hair, my hands, after purifying them at Ramazan or when I go on some pilgrimage. With the half I sell, I shall get me gold enough to buy me a rose garden, a little house, and *live*, happy with my family."

It was his second reference to his family. I knew that family meant his wife, and that I was not to mention her to him without his permission. If you heed such customs in Persia you live.

"Look!" and he pressed me forward until my face was over the giant jar. He took up the light, held it so I could peer, by its reflected rays, into the depths of the greenish-amber liquid. It was so pure, so clear, that I could see the bottom of the jar. Not a speck of dirt, not a taint was in it.

Then he placed the cover on the jar, smiled at me inscrutably. I felt that the incident was ended, and with grave courtesy went with him to the shop, thanked him for his kindness, departed. Yet outside I turned and glanced back. Ali Beg already was hastening toward the hangings, to go back into his niche in the alcove behind the shop. And Firghiz Khan was watching him go—and smiling, smiling, as he stroked his black beard, the black beard that rippled as he caressed it.

"There is a curious thing to be seen in that little garden when the moon swings up to light it," said Afiz Lal, my guide, philosopher, friend during my stay in Nazimpur. I suspected that he profited in the way of commissions on every purchase I made, took toll of my spendings, even at lodging places, sweetmeat shops, but as it is the way of his kind I let him enjoy his perquisites. We were on the little wall dividing the new city from the old, and could look down on the one side into straight streets, where even a trolley ran, and on the other into the twisty, ages-old quarter that was the City of Dreamy Ways. Just below us was the loom of the groups of buildings that made up the bazaar, and the garden Afiz indicated was behind one part of the marketplace.

Presently there was a stir in the garden beneath us. Tiny murmurs, as of folk in pleasure, came drifting up to us, and once,

like falling rose petals, I heard the lilt of a woman's laughter, girlishly sweet.

The moon soared up and over, flooding the garden with a mystic radiance. I saw then, on a little seat, under an overarching rose-tree, a man in a blue robe and a young woman. Her veil was up, and even by the moon's light I could see the passion in her glances. He gathered her into his arms, picked her up and carried her toward the end of the garden nearest the bazaar. As he strode he kissed his burden.

"It was Ali Beg?" I suggested to Afiz.

"Heui!" the rogue mocked; "thou knowest what every one in Nazimpur; save Firghiz Khan, knoweth."

At the first hour of trading next day I went to the stall of Firghiz Khan, determined to ask for some of the priceless *attar*.

"Pish," I thought, "he has enough to bathe a man or a maid in and to spare. Why should he not sell me an ounce, if I offer him enough? The huge jar is large enough for a burial urn and 'tis full."

I found him in his place, stroking his black, crinkly beard. He smiled softly as I wished him health, peace, increase of honors.

"Enter as before," he invited.

Once seated he clapped his hands. A servant came—not Ali Beg, but a crabbed, dark-skinned ferash with dirty turban. But he was deft enough in service.

"Ali has left you?"

"As you see," softly stroking his beard that rippled.

I made no comment. Often it is best not to—in Nazimpur.

"Come," he invited when I had made known my errand. "I may not sell you any of that *attar*, as you know it is my fortune, my delight. I have some other *attar* as good that I may sell you—at a price."

We parted the hangings, went into the alcove.

All in the room was as before, except that the lamp did not glow behind the giant jar. My host lighted it, went to the side of the room and showed me a very large jar which, upon his opening it, gave out the odor of *attar* matching that I had sniffed so de-

lectably from the huge jar in the room's center. Certainly only the greatest expert could have told it from the Shimmer of Gold.

"And this, so like the Shimmer of Gold, you may have for ten *krani* the ounce, for your rich client in Paris," he said, bowing with an air of finality.

I saw he was not in mood to chaffer, that for some odd Oriental reason he was offering me a real bargain.

"I accept," I said. "If your servant will call me porters, I shall have it removed now to my house and made ready for carriage to the coast. The sum is large, but I can produce the money surely upon going to the office of the consulate-general."

"Do not bother your wealthiness about that; your credit is good. I, for the money, will call at your place to-night."

He went out, his tawny robes fluttering. I heard him call for his servant; then his voice receded. I stepped to the hangings, saw him going into the street, heard him imprecating the truant for his absency. Realizing that I might have to wait for a few moments, I glanced curiously about and, I will admit, listened, that I might, perchance, hear some rustle of garments, some sigh, some lilt of pleasant laughter, to tell me that the family of the merchant was somewhere near at hand. But in vain.

A slight current of air made the flame of the lamp to flicker, and that drew my attention to the fact that before going out the merchant had placed the lamp on the floor, behind the giant jar, in such a way that its ray reflected through the alabaster-like substance of the receptacle, as it had the day before. The lambent glow was curiously deadened now, but still mystic, alluring, as it fell on the white marble tiling. At first the flame flickered so that its refracted glow, through the urn, was unsteady, illusively deceptive.

Then the air-current died and the lamp's flame burned straight, slender—and the glow on the tiles was steadily oval. My eyes became fixed on it; my pulses thrummed.

In the glow were shadows, shades of imagined, faintest umbers, and their form was

as the form of a woman! Aye, as if a woman, kneeling, nude, in the translucent urn, cast her beautiful shadow on the floor!

I stepped to the jar, saw that its top was newly sealed with wax—fresh, clean wax. And the seal? It was the seal of the ring that I had seen on the finger of Firghiz Khan as he had stroked his rippling black beard and smiled at me the day before. The air stirred again; the candle flame shivered, the jar's refraction of it grew uneven, the image faded. There was a little bustle in the street, in the outer place. The suave merchant came in with two stout porters. Them I paid.

"The weight of the *attar* in the jar you bought comes to ninety-five pounds of your English weight," reckoned the merchant.

"Then you had weighed it lately; are sure it may not have evaporated?"

"I know what it weighs, as I told you," stroking his black beard with his hand on which was the Persian letter ring of the sapphire seal; "and the weight, oddly enough, is that of my family."

I bowed, went out into the chaffering crowds of the Bazaar of Nazimpur. In the evening Firghiz Khan called on me; I paid him.

Early in the morning I took a tiny sample to an old friend, very expert in perfumes and unguents. He sniffed it.

"It is the Shimmer of Gold *attar*," he judged positively.

"The real, genuine?"

"As I have said," with brown palms out-

spread; "worth a golden bangle a drop. Firghiz Khan must be mad to have sold it—"

I left him gesticulating, raced through the streets to the stall of Firghiz Khan. A lean, dark arhuwazi answered my summons to trade. I demanded of him where Firghiz Khan might be.

"Allah only knows," he made grudging reply; "I bought his place, his trade; his goods. He is gone—"

"Did he take a certain great white alabaster jar with him?"

"That—and only that," with palms held up in affirmation; "he said it contained his treasures—all he loved best—"

"And his servant, Ali Beg?"

"Was found with a knife in his heart outside the city wall at dawn."

Whenever I think of Firghiz Khan it is a thought like this:

A high-turbaned, crinkle-bearded man, grim, terrible, sitting in the little flower-embowered house such a man would buy; sitting, at evening, on a divan in a cool, latticed room, smoking his hubble-bubble before a great urn of translucent attar, through which the light from a Benares hand-hammered brass lamp casts amber-green rays that are broken up by some mass of haunting beauty of form inside the mammoth urn in such a way as to limn out a curious pattern of shade and sheen—the likeness of a beautiful woman kneeling. So he has his treasures with him, as he said.



WHAT LOVE IS

BY MARGUERITE OGDEN BIGELOW

AH, love is strong as the lawless winds
That bear bold waves to the beaten shore;
And love is weak as a cobweb cloud
That fades, and is no more.

Ah, love is bright as the burning sun,
And love is pain past all retreat,
And love is bitter to those who lose—
But love is perilous sweet!

The Substitute Millionaire

by Hulbert Footner

Author of "Chase of the Linda Belle," "The Fugitive Sleuth," "The Huntress," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

JACK NORMAN, twelve-dollar-a-week clerk, was amazed one morning to receive a letter from the president of the greatest bank in New York, asking him to call. He was still more amazed when he learned that old Silas Gyde, multimillionaire miser, who two days before had been blown to pieces by a bomb, had made him sole heir to a fortune of approximately eighty million dollars.

Jack's first thought was of Kate, the pretty stenographer with whom he had been secretly in love for months; but when he approached her on the subject of marriage she very sensibly put him off until she found how he stood his changed circumstances.

Following the instructions left by Gyde, Jack visited the old miser's rooms at the magnificent Hotel Madagascar, which he owned, and where he occupied the cheapest suite in the place; and there, from a letter left for him, he learned that the old man had for years been pursued by a gang of blackmailers, who had at last got him. Determined to outwit them and run them down, Jack decided to lay low for a while, and, with this object in view, hired "Guy Harmsworth," an out-of-work actor, to represent him, while he himself posed as "Jack Robinson," secretary.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MASQUERADE BEGINS.

AS the two young men left the café, Bobo said: "Where are we going now?"

"First we must find quarters," said Jack. "We don't want to carry these valises around all night."

To the chauffeur who opened the taxi door for them Jack said: "Hotel Madagascar."

"My God!" murmured the still dazed Bobo.

As they entered the gorgeous lobby of the famous hotel, Bobo was overcome with self-consciousness. Bobo had always thought of the Madagascar as the abiding-place of remote and exalted aristocrats. He slunk at Jack's heels with the yellow stick trailing limply.

"Buck up! Buck up!" whispered Jack. "Remember you are the cheese, and I'm only the mite that lives off it."

"Sure! Sure!" murmured Bobo, moistening his lips.

He made an effort, but quailed again before the sharp-eyed bell-boys. Jack reflected that, since he was only supposed to be the millionaire of a day, this would appear natural enough.

"Sign the register," he whispered. "Remember you are John Farrow Norman, and I am John Robinson."

Bobo accomplished this all right. As the clerk nonchalantly spun the card around and read the name, he caught his breath slightly, and a wonderful silkiness crept into his voice.

"Very pleased to have you with us, sir. In a way I hope it's like coming home."

The other man behind the desk, arrested

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for November 9.

by the note of exceeding deference, made excuses to sidle past and glance at the register. Instantly a kind of electric current charged the office, and was presently communicated to the bell-boys' bench, whence it spread throughout the lobby. "It's Jack Norman," the busy whisper went around.

"I hope you're going to remain with us permanently, Mr. Norman," added the clerk. "What accommodations will you require?"

Bobo, child of nature, rebounded like a rubber ball, feeling the immense respect conveyed by the whole surrounding atmosphere. Once more the chest went out, and the yellow stick was elevated to the ceiling.

"Er—my secretary will arrange the details with you," he drawled, turning away languidly. One could see his fingers absently feeling for the monocle which ought to have been dangling against his waistcoat button.

Jack stepped forward, modest and businesslike. "Mr. Norman wishes to know if the suite occupied by the late Mr. Gyde is available."

"It's empty, I suppose," was the deprecating reply, "but that is outside my province. I assure you the rooms are very undesirable. Mr. Gyde, you know, was most eccentric."

"But Mr. Norman has been told there was a steel vault in connection, which he thought might be useful."

"Naturally, naturally. Yes, Mr. Gyde had it installed when the hotel was built. But there are only two rooms in the suite, and it does not communicate directly with any other. Moreover, the bedroom is quite dark. It wouldn't do at all."

"H-m!" said Jack. "I suppose not."

"But on the same floor, practically adjoining, you might say, there is a magnificent corner suite of six rooms—the finest in the house. People call it the state suite. Prince Boris occupied it on his recent visit, and the President of Managuay always reserves it."

The apparently indifferent Bobo's ears stretched at this.

"The famous Louis-Quinze salon, with

ceilings by Guglielmetti, is included in this suite, and the Dutch dining-room, decorated by Troward Handler Misty. Each of the bedrooms is done in a different period. I assure you there is nothing like it in New York. It extends all the way down the south side of the building, and it is only a matter of cutting diagonally across the corridor to reach the late Mr. Gyde's suite, which occupies the back corner of that floor. Those rooms belong to Mr. Norman anyway, since they were exempted from our lease. Together with the state suite they would make—but let me have the pleasure of showing them to you."

"What do you think, Mr. Norman?" asked Jack respectfully.

"Oh, take them," said Bobo. "We can change later, if we're not suited." He gave the yellow stick a twirl.

"Certainly, sir."

Having been shown up to their magnificent quarters, Jack firmly dismissed the train of admiring clerks, bell-boys, and maids who overwhelmed them with attentions. Bobo was bearing himself with admirable nonchalance, but Jack thought he saw signs of a coming crack under the strain. There was something comically disproportionate in the relation of their two little selves and their two little valises to that endless suite.

"Our baggage will come to-morrow," Jack casually remarked.

When they were left alone in the Louis-Quinze salon, paneled in blue brocade, they looked around, and they looked at each other.

"Some lil sittin'-room," said Jack.

"My God!" cried Bobo. "An hour ago I was sitting on a bench in Bryant Square, with my stomach deflated like a punctured tube!"

"Some rapid rise."

Bobo gravely butted his head against the blue-satin brocade. "Sure, if I was asleep, that would wake me up."

"Oh, cheer up! We couldn't both be having the same dream together."

"That's true!" said Bobo, looking wonderfully relieved.

"Let's go into the next room," said Jack. "Louis-Quinze isn't homelike."

Entering the Dutch room, he said: "This is rather classy. We can have some nice little parties in here."

"I wish it was time to eat again," said Bobo with sudden recollection. "What a lot of time we waste digesting!"

They were presently informed over the telephone that Mr. Pope, of the *Sphere*, and Mr. Wallis, of the *Constellation*, requested a word or two with Mr. Norman, the millionaire, by fortune.

"The news of our arrival wasted no time in leaking out," remarked Jack.

Looking Bobo over thoughtfully, he decided that further coaching was necessary before the pseudo-millionaire could safely be thrown to the reporters. So he sent down word that Mr. Norman was out, and to avoid possible encounters in the lobby, he and Bobo made their way out by the rear door of the state suite and thence by Silas Gyde's private stair to the entrance on the side street.

At the Broadway corner they paused. The sight of the double procession of automobiles started a new train of desires.

"They ought to keep the automobile show-rooms open all night," said Jack. "A fellow wants to buy a car most after dinner. I sha'n't really believe I am a millionaire—I mean that you are—until we have a snaky-red roadster with twelve cylinders and a search-light."

"I'd rather have a limousine with blue upholstery and a chauffeur in blue livery to take the responsibility," said Bobo, unconcernedly.

"Oh, go as far as you like! Where will we go now?"

"How about the Alpine Heights?"

"Lead me to it!"

This place of entertainment was on the roof of one of the theaters. A discreet privacy shrouded the street entrance. They were whirled aloft in an elevator, and a small army of silver-buttoned boys and lace-capped maids relieved them of their outer wear. The restaurant opened before them like a dream, warm with perfume and color and softened light. It was arranged like a shallow bowl. The bottom of it was a velvety dancing-floor, and all around were low terraces of tables. Overhead was a

balcony, and one end of the place was closed by a great curtain. When this was lifted, a sheet of glittering ice was revealed. The whole place exhaled luxury like the palace of a satrap.

"What a background for the lovely girls!" said Jack. "But the black coats and pants seem entirely out of place here."

"Oh, I don't know!" said Bobo, strutting a little.

Jack's sharp eyes perceived that the first and lowest row of tables was, by a process of judicious selection on the part of the head waiter, filled with the élite of the "Broadway crowd," the women exquisite with their bare shoulders and jewels, the men looking bored and superior, as is expected of supermen. These people, as the cunning management of the restaurant well knew, formed the real attraction to the soberer folk from out of town, who sat farther back drinking it all in with innocent, big eyes. They thought these fine folk must be Astorbilts or Vandergelds, whereas they were more like Pollies of the circus and Handsome Harries in funds.

The head waiter, with a shrewd glance at the two young men, started to lead them to an obscure corner (young men unaccompanied do not spend much), but Jack with a cough attracted his attention, and with discreet motion effected a transfer to his ready hand. Whereupon, after heavy study, he effected to discover a vacant table in a second row. The rail of the balcony was over their heads.

Bobo seized on the bill-of-fare. "I'm hungry again!" he cried in the tone of one making an unexpected and delightful discovery. "Can I order anything I want?"

"Go to it, son!"

"How about champagne? I never tasted it," he added naively.

"What! Never tasted champagne?"

Bobo blushed painfully.

"Well, I never did, either," said Jack, grinning. "One bottle, because this is a party. But, mind you, the limit is always one bottle. We've got considerable head-work to do."

"Sure, that's right," said Bobo, but without any great conviction, and Jack re-

flected that, along with his other preoccupations, he would have to keep an eye on his partner's potations.

Bobo went into conference with the waiter, and in due course a little Lucullan feast was spread before them. It may be remarked in passing that, where his stomach was concerned, Bobo proved to be an astonishingly apt scholar. Within a week he was a menu-card sharp, and within a month the intimate friend of every headwaiter in the leading restaurants along Broadway.

Meanwhile the great curtain was lifted, and enchanting slender-legged damsels in chiffons and furs performed amazing and graceful evolutions on the ice. Between-times, the diners danced on the waxed floor. The teasing music made Jack think of Kate. He looked across the table with distaste.

"What wouldn't I give to have her there instead of that greedy Bobo," he thought. "Lord! I suppose I'm saddled with him now, by day and by night!"

During a pause in the music a small object dropped on their table, bounced, and lay still. It was a piece of paper folded into a pellet.

"A note!" said Bobo excitedly. "We've made a hit with somebody. Is it for you or me, do you think?"

"You can have my share," said Jack indifferently.

Bobo eagerly opened the paper, while Jack's attention strayed over the crowd. He wasn't going to allow the writer of the note to see that the receipt of it excited him at all, like the foolish Bobo, whose hands actually were trembling.

Jack's glance was sharply recalled by an odd little sound from his partner. Bobo's ruddy cheeks had paled, and his mouth was hanging open stupidly.

"Read it!" he gasped, handing the note over.

It was not what Jack expected. There was no salutation.

We have picked up your trail now, and don't you think we'll ever let it go. When one of us drops it, there will be another handy to pick it up. When the time comes we'll strike, and there will be another rotten millionaire the less to sweat

the poor. You will offer a good-size mark. You needn't think your skinny secretary will be any protection. A hundred like him wouldn't save you.

- THE RED GANG.

While the tone of the note was the same as the other, this had been written by an educated hand. Jack looked sharply around the near-by tables. No face betrayed any self-consciousness. Behind them sat an honest couple from the suburbs; in front was a party of eight in evening-dress, the men silly from too much champagne, the women bored and listless; at their right was a young couple, wholly and completely absorbed in each other; at their left, across an aisle, a gay old gentleman and a languid lady of the chorus—it seemed hard to credit that the note could have come from any of these.

"What shall we do?" murmured Bobo tremulously.

"Laugh at it, and let the sender see us laughing," said Jack, suiting the action to the word.

"It seemed to drop straight down," said Bobo.

"The balcony!" thought Jack. He rose without any appearance of haste and made his way up-stairs. He had no difficulty in picking out the table that was just over their heads. It was now empty. The napkins lay where they had been dropped. He summoned the waiter.

"Who sat at that table?"

The man cringed to the authoritative air. "An elderly couple, sir. Never saw them before."

"Describe them."

"Plain people, sir. Quietly dressed. But very genteel and liberal."

This seemed to be about the best the waiter could do, even with the stimulus of a generous tip. He did add that the old gentleman wore a heavy gray mustache and small imperial.

"They have just gone?" said Jack.

"Just took the elevator, sir."

Jack returned to Bobo.

"What shall we do?" said the fat youth again.

"Oh, cheer up! Everything's going fine! Don't you see they've swallowed my bait whole? They think you're the millionaire!"

"That's fine for you," said Bobo, looking around nervously; "but where do I get off at?"

CHAPTER IX.

MR. WHIGHAM.

NEXT morning the delights of purchasing automobiles had to be put off a while longer to allow of some necessary business to be transacted. Jack wanted to secure Mr. Delamare's approval for his new plans. For obvious reasons he did not care to take Bobo to the bank, so he called up the financier and asked him respectfully if he would mind coming to the hotel.

A laugh answered him over the wire. "Would I mind! My dear boy! A banker would go to Tallapoosa to oblige a customer with an account like yours!"

While they waited for him they breakfasted in the Dutch room. Bobo's appetite showed no evil effects resulting from his scare of the night before. During the meal the card of a visitor was brought them.

H. J. WHIGHAM

The Eureka Protective Association

"Ha!" cried Jack. "Exactly according to schedule!"

"What's that?" asked Bobo.

"Last night we got the rough stuff, to-day the smooth."

"I don't understand."

"Keep your ears open, and you'll see. Just let your little secretary deal with this gent for you."

Jack asked that Mr. Whigham be sent up. An old-young man was shown in to them, a starched-and-ironed little fellow, with an air of self-importance like a cock-sparrow's.

"If this is a dangerous crook," thought Jack, "he's got a damn clever line of comedy. Looks like a necktie-clerk."

"Mr. Norman?" inquired the newcomer with a birdlike quirk of the head from one to another.

Jack waved his hand in Bobo's direction.

"Mr. Norman, I have a proposition to make to you."

"My secretary will talk to you," said Bobo with the drawl he now affected.

He went on with his breakfast and the reading of the newspaper—but missed nothing of what was said. Jack had been well-advised in keeping from him that there was any connection between Mr. Whigham and the Red Gang. Bobo could scarcely have maintained that air of nonchalance had he known it.

"What can we do for you?" asked Jack politely. "Excuse me if I go on with my breakfast. We were up late last night."

"Don't mention it," said Mr. Whigham. "I am early. I came early on purpose, because I thought later you would be besieged by cranks and triflers of all kinds. I have a genuine proposition to make, Mr. Norman. It is one I felt ought to get to him without a moment's delay."

"Open it."

Mr. Whigham talked smoothly, and at considerable length. It had the effect of something well-rehearsed. Jack, as we know, had it all beforehand. Only the essential parts of his spiel need be given.

"Both of you gentlemen are no doubt aware of the great increase of anarchistic activity in this country of recent years."

At the word "anarchistic" Bobo started, and let the newspaper sink to the table.

"The police of this and other cities have worked hard to check this evil. They watch the Reds as well as they are able; close up their meeting-places—when they find them—arrest them on the least shadow of evidence. This is all right as far as it goes—understand, gentlemen, I am not knocking the police; but the fact remains that the horrible outrages continue. I need not speak of the latest one, which concerns Mr. Norman so closely."

Bobo shuddered.

"The police method is like treating an ulcer with external applications only. You may heal it up, but it will only break out in another place. Now, the Eureka Association was formed three years ago to deal with the matter from another angle. Not in opposition to the police, nor in alliance

with them, but quite independently. We never inform on the Reds, nor prosecute them."

"You make friends with them?" suggested Jack.

"In a way, yes. Our agents become Reds; join their circles, watch them, and report to the main office as to the plots they hatch. Our organization has now been brought to such a point of perfection that we are in a position to guarantee our subscribers absolute immunity from the attacks of anarchists."

"Was the late Mr. Gyde a member?" Jack asked slyly.

"He was not," said Mr. Whigham significantly. "He had rejected our respectful solicitations from time to time. Nevertheless, out of pure humanity we warned him of what was about to occur. With characteristic obstinacy he ignored the warning—well, you know what happened."

"But they say that Emil Jansen, his assailant, was not a member of any regular circle."

"'They say!'" said Mr. Whigham sarcastically. "What do 'they' know?"

"What's the damage?" asked Jack.

"Hey?" said Mr. Whigham.

"What does the service cost?"

"Five hundred dollars a month."

Jack whistled. "There's nothing small about you."

Mr. Whigham earnestly pointed out the tremendous expenses attached to the association, including enormous salaries paid to the special agents to recompense them for the risks they ran.

"Why did you say you wanted to get to us without loss of time?"

"We are informed that a plot is already hatching against Mr. Norman. The Reds aim to make a spectacular double-play by getting Mr. Gyde's successor."

Bobo gasped and looked imploringly at Jack.

"And if Mr. Norman pays up the five hundred you'll give the plot away?" Jack suggested dryly.

"No, sir," was the instant reply. "My instructions are to give you what information we have in any case. The Eureka is something more than a sordid, money-

making concern. It supplies a real service to the community. For a reference I am instructed to give you the name of Mr. Walter Delamare, who is well known to you."

"H-m!" thought Jack. "This scheme is even cleverer than I expected. Aloud he asked: 'What is the information you have?'"

"That a man will be waiting this morning to attack Mr. Norman on the steps of the New York National Bank. Mr. Norman is advised not to visit Mr. Delamare's office for the time being."

"Good God!" said Bobo.

"What is your pleasure in the matter?" Jack asked Bobo with a respectful air.

"Oh, pay him! Pay him!" was the agitated reply.

A pleased, far-away look appeared in Mr. Whigham's eye. He was evidently figuring on how he would spend his commission.

"Will you sign a check?" asked Jack.

Jack and Bobo went into the next room, and presently returned with a check, which was handed to Mr. Whigham. That little gentleman received it with thanks, and, bowing, left, with a promise to send "the contracts" around as soon as they could be made out.

Jack fell into a study.

"What do you make of it all?" Bobo asked helplessly.

"I may be wrong," said Jack slowly, "but my guess is that Whigham has a nice little wife and baby, and lives in a semi-detached, with a neat back yard, in Bayonne. I believe he is a member of the men's Bible class and the Y. M. C. A., and is in every way a decent little citizen, without a suspicion of the real nature of the devilish business he is engaged in. We'll have to look a long way past him for the principal."

"Devilish business!" repeated Bobo. "Don't—don't you believe what he said about the Reds being after you—I mean me—and all?"

"Not a word! Though I think the worthy little man believed it himself."

"But all that—about the man waiting on the bank steps?"

"Stage-stuff. Everybody read in the

papers that Mr. Delamare was Silas Gyde's executor. A safe guess that you'd be likely to go to his office to-day. It was just a stall. As a matter of fact, we weren't going, anyway. Mr. Delamare is coming here."

"Just the same, I wouldn't go—not for all you've offered me!" said Bobo fervently.

"Sure, that's where the pull of the scheme comes in. Look at it reasonably. If the anarchists really meant to croak a millionaire for the good of humanity, as their letter suggested, would they warn him with a letter? Not on your life! Those letters were simply to pave the way for Whigham. But the beauty of the scheme, the novelty of it, lies in the fact that Whigham is not in the secret. They use an innocent little Sunday-school teacher to collect their tribute!"

"Then you think there's no danger?"

"Oh, danger enough if we had refused to fork out. There was danger in it for Silas Gyde."

"Well, I'm mighty glad we paid!"

"Sure! Now let me think. This matter will stand a lot of doping out."

They soon began to experience the full effects of newspaper publicity. A crowd of newspaper reporters, solicitors, cranks, high-toned beggars, besieged the hotel, and in every delivery arrived a stack of letters a foot high.

The hotel management designated its most experienced bell-boy to wait upon them exclusively. This youth, Ralph by name, was smart and good-looking, but he had too knowing an eye. His knowledge of life, particularly of the seamy side of life, was disconcerting. Jack felt impelled to warn Bobo to be guarded in Ralph's presence. Jack decided they would have to forego the luxury of personal servants. The danger of the betrayal of their secret was too great.

After schooling Bobo for the ordeal, Jack had the reporters up-stairs, but excluded photographers. Bobo acquitted himself well enough in the interviews that followed. True, he turned to Jack for aid at every other question, but there was nothing in itself suspicious that the newly-made mil-

lionaire seemed to be of a soft and dependent character. Jack could see the eyes of the reporters turn on himself enviously. They seemed to be saying:

"Gee! This guy has fallen into a good thing! He runs the show!"

Mr. Delamare arrived in company with Hugh Brome, Jack's lawyer, and the reporters were politely ushered out. Bobo was introduced to the newcomers, and Jack explained the part he was to play. They stared—then they laughed.

"Is it all right?" asked Jack anxiously. "Do you approve?"

"You're keeping the check-signing privilege in your own hands, I assume," said Mr. Delamare.

"Certainly."

"Well, as your banker, that's all I'm concerned with. As your friend, I may say I think it's a good scheme. You will have a close, outside view of a millionaire's life that will be of inestimable service to you when you have to take up that life."

Jack told him of the call of the Eureka Protective Association's representative, and mentioned that his, Mr. Delamare's, name had been offered as a reference.

The banker smote his palm with his fist. "By gad! It's a fact!" he said. "I had forgotten all about it. I subscribed three years ago, after poor Ames Benton's death, when we were all scared, and I suppose the payments have been going on ever since by my orders. At the time I thought the scheme was on the square, and I have never thought about it since. But they didn't tax me anything like as much as you. I suppose their ideas were more modest at the beginning. I must put a stop to my contributions."

"Wouldn't it be better to wait until I have looked into the agency?" suggested Jack.

Delamare shook his head decisively. "I can't stand for anything like that."

Having obtained the approval of his banker and his lawyer for his plans, Jack felt encouraged to go ahead. As Delamare and Brome were leaving, Jack said:

"Can either of you put me in touch with a high police official, a man I can apply to in case of need?"

"I know the third deputy commissioner," said Delamare. "I'll give you a note to him."

When Jack and Bobo started out on the automobile-buying expedition, they left the Madagascar by the front door.

"The back door must be saved for emergencies," said Jack. "We'll have to get used to running the gantlet."

However, since no photographs had yet been published, they were not generally recognized in the lobby. They only had one encounter. That was in that well-known cross-corridor behind the lobby, where under the softly shaded lights amid tropical verdure lovely ladies await their companions for luncheon and tea. As Bobo and Jack passed through, one of these, a really dazzling creature in an ermine cape, jumped up from her fauteuil.

"Mr. Norman!" she cried, addressing Bobo. "I'm sure I can't be mistaken!"

Bobo fell back in dismay. Jack looked on with a twinkle. It was not up to him to rescue his partner. The lady was of that highly-finished type that defies time—for a long time. She might have been twenty-eight or thirty-eight. For furs, millinery, and hair-dressing one couldn't see much of the woman God made, except a pair of big, blue eyes, the whites slightly discolored from make-up. Her clothes outstyled style—but all was in good taste. It looked like the real thing.

"I am Clara Birmingham that was," she went on. "Don't you remember me?"

"I—I can't say I do," stammered Bobo ungallantly.

She laughed charmingly. "Well, it's not surprising, since we were both children when I used to visit Cartonsville. I recognized you from your likeness to your mother. You must come to see me. I am Mrs. Anson Cleaver now. You'll find me in the phone-book. By the way, I'm having some people in to-night for music. Can't you come?"

"I'm afraid I—I—Mr. Robinson and I have an engagement."

Mrs. Cleaver turned inquiringly toward Jack.

"Mr. Robinson, my secretary," explained Bobo.

"Bring him with you. I should be charmed!"

With that she sailed away.

As soon as she was out of sight Bobo became very bold and looked at Jack with a doggish air, as much as to say: "That's the way to handle them!" But Jack laughed, and he wilted rather.

"Can we go to-night?" he asked meekly.

"Oh, you want to go now."

"It would be sport, wouldn't it?"

"Well, I'll see."

Later he went into a booth and called up Mr. Delamare.

"This is Robinson," he said.

"Robinson?" came the puzzled reply.

"Mr. Norman's secretary."

"Oh, of course!" with a laugh. "What can I do for you?"

"I come to you in every difficulty."

"That's as it should be. What now?"

"Did you ever hear of a lady called Mrs. Anson Cleaver?"

"Surely! Everybody has heard of Mrs. Cleaver. It's easy to see you don't read the society columns."

"She's the real thing, then?"

"Well—not quite. Owing to the publicity she gets, she passes in the mind of the public as one of our leaders. But they say she has rather a strangely assorted crowd at her house, and conservative ladies—like Mrs. Delamare—are a little, what shall I say, leery of her. Nothing against her reputation, you understand, but she's considered a little too spectacular in her methods."

"She made out to recognize Bobo from his likeness to my mother, and asked us to a musicale to-night. I thought she was a crook."

"Oh, hardly that! That was only a ladies' lie. Perfectly justifiable under the circumstances."

"What circumstances?"

"My dear fellow! You forget the éclat of a hundred millions! Think what a drawing card you—I mean Bobo—will be at her entertainments. She intends to be the first to exhibit him."

"Then it will be all right for us to go?"

"Why not? It will be amusing—and it can't very well do you any harm."

Just the same, when Jack hung up the receiver a doubt remained in his mind. "How did it happen she picked on Bobo with such certainty?" he wondered. "No photograph has been published."

There followed a delightful orgy of spending, during which Jack threw off all cares. The whole of Automobile Row, from Fiftieth Street to Seventy-Second, seemed to have been forewarned of their coming, and their progress was like a triumphal procession. The sleek, exquisite, expensive cars were put through their paces like willing slaves awaiting a master. Failing to agree on a type they bought both Jack's dashing roadster and Bobo's imperial limousine.

They spent several hours with a millionaire's tailor, Bobo, with ecstatic eyes like a dreamer, choosing suit after suit. Finally they purchased the best ready-made outfit obtainable for the party that night.

CHAPTER X.

PLANS AND PLOTS.

JACK and Bobo dined in the main restaurant of the Madagascar. By this time they were pretty well known in the hotel, and curious, envious glances followed them whenever they went. It was meat and drink to Bobo, though he affected to be much annoyed by it.

"What do you suppose they're staring at?" he drawled.

"Your fatal beauty," said Jack.

Evening dress had gone to Bobo's head somewhat. The big white shirt-front puffed out alarmingly. Among his new possessions was a fine watch that he drew out to consult every three minutes or so. He could not contain his impatience to get to the party.

"Hadn't we better be moving?"

"Good Lord! It isn't eight o'clock. What do you think this is, an M. E. social?"

"What time are you going then?"

"About ten, I should say. The later we come, the more effect it will have."

"How will we put in the time until then?"

"I have another date. I'll take you along with me."

Bobo, when he forgot himself, dropped into his usual Tenderloin slang. "Gee! I always wanted to go into society. I felt I was fitted for it. I like everything of the choicest. These common mutts gimme a pain. I'll show the swell guys a thing or two to-night. They'll have to hand it to me."

"You'd better cut out the guys and the gimmes," suggested Jack.

"Oh, I've got a line of classy talk, all right, when I need it. Wasn't I dresser for Bill Calverly the matinee idol, season before last? He used to show me all his mash notes. How's this?"

Bobo screwed an imaginary monocle into his eye, and was suddenly prostrated with languor. "Er—How-de-do, Mrs. Cleaver. So sorry we were late. But a lawyer fellow turned up just as I was leaving my hotel, and I couldn't put him off. Business is such a bother, isn't it?"

"Great!" said Jack dryly. "But tip me a wink before you begin, so I can beat it."

"Oh, you've got to back me up!" said Bobo. "For the love Mike, don't leave me stranded on the grand stairway."

Bobo's limousine, the perfection of luxury and elegance was waiting for them in front of the hotel. Bobo in silk hat, evening overcoat, fluffy white scarf, and white kids, with the inevitable yellow stick crooked over his arm, enjoyed a wonderful moment standing on the top step of the Madagascar waiting for his car to pull up. He flicked the ash from his cigarette, and the humble pedestrians looked up admiringly.

It is not vouchsafed to many of us so completely to realize our dreams. Bobo's dream was based on the cigarette advertisements in color on the inside covers of popular magazines. Jack, similarly attired, watched him with a twinkle from a respectful stand to the rear. In his enjoyment of the situation he was perfectly content to play a secondary part. It was lots more fun, he thought, to pull the wires from behind the scenes.

When they got in the car Jack gave the chauffeur an address on East Sixty-Ninth Street.

"What are we going to Yorkville for?" asked Bobo.

"To see an old friend."

"I hate to leave the white lights."

Bobo insisted on keeping the dome-light burning. Jack suspected that the real reason his heart had been set on a limousine was that the wide windows afforded the populace every facility to see him pass in his glory.

They drew up before a cheap apartment-house, one of a long row in an untidy street.

"Gee, what a crummy joint!" said Bobo fastidiously.

"It would have seemed plenty good enough yesterday," said Jack coldly.

Jack had no desire to take Bobo upstairs with him. "You stay here till I come down," he said. "I may be an hour, but you've got plenty of cigars. Take a snooze. We'll be up late."

In the vestibule Jack searched among the double row of labels for the name that made his heart beat faster—Storer. Pressing the bell-button, presently an answering click in the door-latch informed him that the way in was open. He made his way up four flights of narrow, ill-lighted stairs with a dirty carpet. Through the thin doors issued the sounds of incontinent domestic broils, and every landing offered the nose a different smell—but all unpleasant. Jack shuddered—not because he couldn't endure the smells, but at the thought that his dear and dainty Kate was obliged to dwell among them.

Kate opened the door, a rare vision in that grimy frame. At the sight of Jack's regalia she quailed a little, but quickly recovered herself. Jack would have kissed her if she had given him the least opening, but she did not. She invited him in with an air better than Mrs. Cleaver's. Once the door closed the squalor was forgotten. It was a lady's room, however small and poorly furnished.

"How grand we are!" said Kate chaffingly.

Jack explained where he was going later.

"I'll call mother," said Kate. "She has been anxious to meet you."

"Wait!" said Jack. "You must introduce me as Mr. Robinson."

Kate frowned. "Must? To mother? I can't do that."

"I'll explain—" began Jack.

But at that moment the old lady walked in.

She was a dear little old lady, the old-fashioned kind of mother, quite rare in a New York flat. She wore a black silk dress many times turned and white at the seams, and a little cap which was never quite straight, giving her a lovable, rakish expression.

Jack looked appealingly at Kate, who hesitated, and gulped. "Mother, this—this is Mr. Robinson," she said.

"How do you do, Mr. Robinson!" said Mrs. Storer, in a voice like a little girl's. She affected to take no notice of Jack's grandeur, though it must surely have been a notable sight in that poor little room. "I have not heard Katherine speak of you. Where did you meet Mr. Robinson, Katherine?"

"Mr. Robinson was—was formerly in our office," said poor Kate.

The little old lady made polite conversation for five minutes, and then having established the proprieties, like a thoroughbred mother, she made a transparent excuse to disappear and was seen no more.

"She's a corker!" said Jack.

Kate beamed on him.

Through the open window came the sounds of a violent, vulgar altercation from the flat below. Kate closed the window with an oblivious air.

"I expect you've had an exciting day," she said. "What did the papers mean by saying that you were fat, and that you had a good-looking secretary to whom you turned for everything?"

"I'm the good-looking one," said Jack, grinning.

"I don't understand."

"I'll explain in a minute, but first—"

"Please!" she said with an admonishing gesture.

"Kitty, I can't help it! I can't play up to you. If you knew how it hurt to find you living in such a place—"

"We don't have to live here," she said with quick pride. "We're saving our money so we can go abroad."

"That's not true. I know how much they pay in the sort of place where you

work, and how much it costs to live. I have been through the mill. It takes every cent you earn to keep up this place. And you're always thinking what would you do if you got sick or were without a job, even for a week. That's what makes that little line between your dear eyes."

Kate laughed delicately. "Mercy, you're quite a mind-reader!"

Jack floundered on. "And me with all this rotten money! Every cent I spent shames me, thinking of you here—and your mother."

"You haven't spent any since you met mother, have you?" she suggested maliciously.

"Don't tease me! I'm in earnest. Why will you be so silly?"

"Are you proposing that I accept a gift of some of your new riches?"

"I'm proposing that you accept me."

"I would never marry a man that pitied me."

"Oh, Kate!" he said graveled and reproachful. "How silly!"

Then he got his wind again. "That's only putting me off. What's pity got to do with it or anything? I just want you!"

"Why didn't you ask me when you were poor?" she murmured.

"How could I? I could scarcely keep myself."

"Then I am just a sort of luxury."

"Oh, Kitty! How unjust! You take a delight in putting me in the wrong!"

"It's no use," she said with a firm shake of the head. "I haven't changed since yesterday. If you insist on bringing this up every day, it will only have the effect of spoiling my naturally amiable temper. Let's change the subject. Tell me all your adventures since yesterday."

He was no match for her. He had to obey.

But if she was cruel in other respects, she made a rare listener. Her eyes sparkled and her soft cheeks glowed with excitement as his tale unfolded. When the devilish workings of the blackmailing scheme were made clear to her, her indignation knew no bounds.

"The wretches! The beasts!" she murmured. "Oh, they must not be allowed to

go free. That poor lonely old man! It is fine of you to pledge yourself to run them down. It's a crusade in a way, isn't it—and a dangerous one!" She gave him an extraordinary look through her lashes. "Come to me after you have done your work," she murmured, "and perhaps my answer will be different!"

"Oh, Kate!" he said, reaching for her hand.

She neatly evaded him. "Afterward, I said. Now, tell me what you mean to do."

He told her.

"I wish I could help!" she said involuntarily.

Jack had a dazzling inspiration. It must have been his good fairy that sent him that lovely idea all complete and ready to work.

"Why, you can help!" he cried.

"How?"

He made out, of course, that the idea had been in his head all the time. "Listen. As Jack Norman's secretary I'm bound to become a pretty well-known figure around town, and it stands to reason I can't do much sleuthing in that character. I've got to have a disguise. I've got to lead a double life. I'll work while Bobo sleeps."

"Yes, but what has that got to do with me?"

"Listen, I'm coming to that. I've told you about our suite at the Madagascar, and Silas Gyde's two little rooms, and the secret way into the house next door. Now, you see, I'll go to bed in the hotel as Jack Norman's secretary, and in the morning I'll come out of the house next door prepared for work in another character."

"But what am I to do?"

"That house belongs to me, you know, though the deed has never been transferred. You must appear to rent it, furnish it and open it as a first-class boarding-house—no furnished apartments would be easier for you."

"But—"

"Wait a minute. Then I can rent the second floor rear from you in my new character? I can pass back and forth through the vault as I like, and no one can possibly trace the connection between Jack Norman's secretary and the sober little business man who lives in your house, see?"

"Oh, I couldn't!"

"Why?"

"Mother wouldn't like it. And I—I'm not fitted for that sort of thing."

"You could make a bluff at it. You said you wanted to help."

"But would it be helping? I think you're just trying to make an excuse to get us out of this place."

"Nonsense! I had it in mind before I ever came to-night. It's absolutely necessary to the success of my plans!"

"You're just trying to get around me."

"I'm not! How could I trust anybody else with the secret of that vault?"

Jack had struck the right line at last. She could not resist this form of flattery, and in the end she gave in. "But I warn you I'll make that house pay," she said.

"Oh, go as far as you like."

They discussed their arrangements in detail. Once she had consented, Kate entered into it with a will. In the midst of their talk a clock struck one.

"Half-past nine!" said Jack, starting up. "I clean forgot Bobo, down-stairs!"

"Why didn't you bring him up?" said Kate. "I'm curious to see him."

"Thanks," said Jack, "but for once I wanted to play first fiddle myself."

At the door he gave her her final instructions. "You will start in to-morrow?"

"Yes," she said promptly. "I know a girl that will be pleased to pieces to substitute for me at the typewriter."

"Oh, you'll never go back there," said Jack.

"We'll see," she said demurely. As a matter of fact her heart was singing at the prospect of release from horrible monotony.

"My lawyer will come here in the morning with the keys, and the necessary funds," said Jack.

"Oh, don't have him come here. I'll go to his office."

"Very well, if you'd rather. I'll write down the address. You and I mustn't see each other again until I come to you to apply for a room. Can you open up in three days?"

"Three days!" she cried aghast.

"Oh, things are made easy for you, I find, when you have the coin."

"Well, I'll try."

Jack went down the stairs two steps at a time, not at all displeased with himself. Had he not rescued Kate from her squalid surroundings, and made sure of being able to see her as often as he wanted? Let her fight him as she would, she was his partner already. She must come all the way some day soon. It was silly for her to make out she didn't mind poverty. She had given it away, in spite of herself.

The elegant limousine still rested at the curb, the chauffeur fast asleep in the corner of the front seat. The dome light was now out and Jack could not see into the body of the car. He was astonished when he opened the door to find it empty. The chauffeur woke up instinctively.

"Where is Mr. Norman?" demanded Jack, staring at the spot where he ought to have been.

"'Deed I don't know, sir. He was inside, all right, when I dropped off. I heard you tell him to take a snooze, so I thought I—"

"Sure, that's all right," said Jack. "He's big enough to take care of himself."

He looked anxiously up and down the street, but there was no sign of his silk-hatted friend.

CHAPTER XI.

BOBO AMONG THIEVES.

JACK was at a loss which way to turn. Suddenly at a street-level window of the apartment-house he had just left, he saw a fat woman resting her folded arms on a pillow on the sill. She looked as if she had been there for hours. He approached, lifting his hat.

"Excuse me, madam, but did you see my friend get out of the car?"

"Sure, I see him," she replied in scornful accents. "Didn't he get out and walk up and down gapping and stretching like he was tired of waiting for you?"

"I'm sorry," murmured Jack. She seemed to expect it. Then: "Which way did he go?"

"Well, a fellow come along from Lexington Avenue way, and they got into talk like. The fellow said: 'Fine night, friend.'

And your friend said: 'Right you are!' One thing led to another, and the fellow said: 'That your car?' And your friend says: 'One of them.'

"The fool!" groaned Jack inwardly. Aloud he asked: "When was this?"

"Half an hour ago, maybe. And the fellow says: 'What make is it?' 'Goodwin twelve, ninety horse,' said the other fellow. And—"

"Yes, I know; but which way did they go?"

But the fat woman was not going to be cheated of the telling of her tale. "I'm coming to that. And the fellow said—I don't mean your friend, but the other fellow, he said: 'She's new, ain't she?' And the other fellow said—that's the swell guy I'm referrin' to—the swell guy says: 'Just out of the shop.' By and by the fellow said: 'Will you drink with me?' And your friend says: 'Sure!' And they went in the side door of the saloon on the corner yonder."

"Much obliged," said Jack, darting across the road.

His quarry had flown. There were half a dozen men lined up before the mahogany, but Bobo was not among them. Neither was he in the small sitting-room behind. Jack applied himself to the white-jacketed bartender.

"Did a friend of mine come in here about half an hour ago?"

"Fellow dressed like yourself?"

Jack nodded.

"Sure, he come in here with a little guy with a bad eye."

"What d'ye mean, bad eye?"

"Crooked." He had a face you could break rocks on. I thought at the time it was a case of a come-on, but it weren't my place to interfere, 'specially as you friend seemed sober enough. But he certainly was lappin' 'em up!"

Jack began to get seriously anxious.

"They downed four whiskies in less'n ten minutes. Least, your friend did. Little guy just tasted hisn. Then they left."

"Where did they go?"

"Search me! Little guy says he knows a better place down the avenue, but I didn't hear the name of it. Swell guy says he can't go because he's waiting for his friend,

but little fellow says: 'Ah, we'll be back in fifteen minutes,' and swell guy says: 'He's callin' on a dame acrosst the street, so I guess he's good for another half-hour.' Then they went out the front door."

One of the regulars of the place who had heard Jack's inquiry took up the story here. "They got in a taxicab," he said. "I was watching out of the window. It was Gus Harris's car it was."

"Gus'll tell you where he took 'em," said the bartender soothingly.

"He'll be back in a minute if he don't pick up another fare in the street," the other speaker said. "Just stick around a while."

By this time everybody present was interested in Jack's quest. "Here he is! Here's Gus!" half a dozen voices cried, as a battered taxicab came to a stand before the door. They all followed him out on the pavement.

"Did you pick up a friend of mine here?" asked Jack of the driver.

"You know, Gus. Swell guy with the tile and the wedding fixings," some one added.

"Sure!" said Gus.

"Where did you take him?"

"McGann's—Third, near Fifty-Eighth."

The name had an ominous ring. "McGann's?" said Jack. "Hasn't that place a bad name?"

"The worst in town," said Gus cheerfully. "Want me to take you there?"

"Thanks, my own car is around the corner," said Jack.

He hastened to it.

Jack's heart sunk at the aspect of McGann's. Never had he been in a place better suited to deeds of evil. In front there was an ordinary bar of the humbler kind. It was empty except for the bartender busy pouring drinks which were carried behind a screen at the rear, by a waiter whose blotched face and furtive eyes suggested an unimagined degradation. Bartender and waiter stared at Jack with a sneer.

"What, another?" the former said under his breath.

Behind the screen Jack found himself in a big, low-ceiled room set with tables more

than half filled with drinkers of both sexes. The walls were dark and greasy, the air thick with the smoke of unspeakable cigars. The strangest feature of the place was the silence that filled it. The drinkers for the most part sat huddled in their chairs with eyes cast down or caps pulled low. When they conversed it was in hoarse whispers. When one wanted more drink he held up a finger. It was a strange scene of merry-making.

The presiding genius of the place was a head-waiter, or "bouncer," who did not soil his hands with serving, but lolled about the place watching his patrons with a hard, inimical eye, like an animal-trainer. Jack instinctively lowering his voice to suit the hushed air of the place, addressed his usual question to this individual.

The man looked him over insolently before replying. A defiant sneer turned the corners of his lips. "He ain't been here," he said curtly. His look said: "Sure, I'm lying. What are you going to do about it?"

Jack flushed and clenched his teeth. Turning his back on the man, he addressed the room at large with raised voice.

"I'm looking for a friend of mine. Young fellow about twenty-four, full habit, red cheeks, wearing a silk hat, white muffler, black overcoat. Have any of you seen him? I'll pay for information."

Those huddled around the walls stirred in discomfort at the sound of a voice so boldly raised in that place of whispers. None answered Jack. None would look at him directly. The bouncer laughed unpleasantly.

"Are you satisfied? Now you can get out!"

It was galling to Jack's pride, but he saw nothing for it but to obey. He walked out slowly, with as much dignity as a man could muster under the circumstances. He was in horrid expectation of a cowardly kick from behind. But he would not turn around.

He paused in front of the place and looked up and down for a policeman. While he stood there one of the furtive figures slouched out of the doorway behind him, and, without stopping, whispered: "Follow me a little way, and I'll tell you."

The man led him into the shadow of a near-by doorway. There were plenty of people passing, and Jack's own chauffeur was still within hail. He was not under any apprehension of an attack.

"Is it worth a fiver to you?" the man whined. "McGann would half kill me if he knew I told."

Jack displayed a five-dollar bill. "It is worth a fiver," he said, "but I'll hang on it, until I hear what you have to say."

"That's fair enough. Your friend come into McGann's about half an hour back. He was with a guy that's well known there. Wouldn't do you no good to know his name. He's a friend of the boss, and a bad egg. They had one or two, and your friend got groggy."

"Doped?" said Jack.

The man shrugged. "I didn't name it. Pretty soon the fellow that brought him there says to Stinger—Stinger's the big guy, the bouncer there—he says to Stinger: 'Me friend's real sick,' he says. 'We better put him to bed.' We all knows what that means."

"What does that mean?" demanded Jack.

"Oh, they was just going to roll him. But just as they was liftin' him up a stranger come in, old man, short and stoutish, with a big mustache and a little chin-whisker, not to say a swell guy, but dressed real decent and genteel like. He was old, but my God! he had his nerve with him.

"'Put that man down!' says he."

"'W'at the hell is it to you?' says Stinger."

"'He's a friend of mine,' the old feller says. 'I'll take him home.'"

"'The hell you will!' says Stinger. 'Get out of here before I throw you out!'"

"'You won't do that,' the old man says, smiling real polite."

"Then Stinger makes for him. The old guy pulled a police whistle. Stinger slung a chair at him, but he ducked the chair, and blew his whistle. The guy that brought your friend in, and some other guys that was wanted, beat it out the back way. The rest of us just sat there. Stinger rushed the old guy, but he pulled a gun and backed him off."

"Well, a cop come running in, and here's

the funny part. The old guy didn't make out to lay no charge against Stinger, but all of a sudden he made out to be friends with him. The old guy says:

"'Sorry to trouble you officer, but I had a friend here fightin' drunk, and he tried to make a rough-house when I wanted him to come home. But he's all in now; he won't give us any further trouble. Just help me carry him out to my car, will you?'"

"Well, the cop on this beat didn't want to get in wrong with McGann, and Stinger didn't want no trouble with the police, neither. So it all ended friendly like. The cop and Stinger carried your friend out between them, and put him in the old guy's automobile. But, say, Stinger cursed the old guy good when he was gone."

"You don't know where they took my friend?" Jack asked.

The man shrugged. "Headed downtown," he said. "That's all I know. But I took good note of the car, if it's any good to you. It was one of these here, now, limousines, like yours yonder, but with a long body like a private ambulance, and painted black. It carried a Connecticut license."

"What number?"

"Ah! I didn't have no pencil to take it down. I forget."

This was all the information Jack could extract. He handed over the bill, and the man scuttled away. Jack returned to his car, and stood with his foot on the running-board, trying to plan out some reasonable course of action.

"Old man, short and thick-set," he thought, "heavy mustache and little chin-whisker; sounds like our friend who dropped us the note last night. Looks like out of the frying-pan into the fire for Bobo. But why should the Red Gang kidnap him when we've paid up? Maybe my whole theory of the case is wrong."

He could think of nothing better to do than go to police headquarters and send out an alarm for a long black limousine with a Connecticut license. This would play havoc with his carefully laid plans. Nevertheless, he was about to give the order to his chauffeur, when a boy of the street stopped be-

side him, and with inimitable grinning impudence said:

"Say, fella, you'll find what you're lookin' for at the Hotel Madagascar."

Jack, greatly startled, caught the boy by the arm. "Here, you, give an account of yourself!" he demanded.

The boy wriggled in his grasp and whimpered: "Ah! I ain't done nottin'!"

"Who told you to tell me that?"

"Old guy in a big black limousine. Lemme go! I ain't done nottin'!"

"Where?"

"At the next corner there. I was just standin' there when the car come across Third and stopped beside me. Old guy stuck his head out and ast me did I want to make half a dollar. I says sure. And he gimme it. And he says tell that guy in the silk hat standin' by the car in front of McGann's that he'll find what he's lookin' for at the Hotel Madagascar. Then he spoke to his shuffer, and they went on toward the bridge."

"Was he alone in the car?"

"Sure. Except the shuffer."

Jack was at a loss how much of this to believe. As a matter of precaution, he decided to hang on to the boy for the present. "You come along with me," he said.

The boy obeyed with mixed feelings. He was still scared, but the prospect of such a ride cheered him. His attitude persuaded Jack that his tale was probably true. If he had had any connection with the Red Gang, he would scarcely have yielded himself up to Jack so willingly. Jack gave the word to return to the Madagascar. As they drove off the boy waved his hand to his envious companions in the street. At the hotel Jack left him in charge of the chauffeur.

He found Bobo safe on his own bed.

Inquiry at the office revealed the fact that half an hour before he had been brought home very much the worse for wear by an elderly friend, who departed as soon as he had put him in his room. Jack dismissed the boy and sent the car to the garage.

Returning to their suite, Jack gazed grimly at the recumbent Bobo, who appeared to have suffered no permanent harm.

He lay sprawled on the bed, breathing stertorously. The big, white shirt-bosom was rumpled and stained. His overcoat lay in a heap beside the bed. Jack was greatly relieved, but indignant, and more puzzled than ever.

"I didn't suspect our friend with the imperial of being a philanthropist," he thought. "His letters certainly didn't read that way. Why the deuce did he take the risk of kidnaping Bobo from McGann's if he only meant to bring him home? It beats the Dutch!"

Suddenly Bobo sat up with a grunt. "Wassa matter?" he asked thickly.

"That's what I'd like to know," said Jack.

Recollection returned to Bobo in a flash, and he clapped his head between his hands. "Lord! But I'm sick!" he groaned hol- lowly.

"Get up," said Jack coldly. "Go into the bath-room, and stick your head in cold water. I'll send for a pot of coffee for you."

Bobo put a hand to his waistcoat-pocket, and seemed about to burst into tears. "My watch is gone!" he wailed.

"You're lucky to be here yourself! A nice chase you've led me!"

"What time is it?"

Jack consulted his watch. "Ten fifteen. It's been a busy forty-five minutes!"

It was a much chastened Bobo that presently returned to the room. "What happened to me?" he asked.

"I'll tell you. You fell into the hands of the Red Gang, that's all; the same little gentleman with the imperial that dropped us a line last night. Why, after capturing you, he was content to give you up again, I don't know."

Bobo turned pale, and his knees weakened under him. He dropped in a chair. "The Red Gang!" he murmured. "Oh, my God! Never again! Never again, s'elp me, Bob! Never another drop unless you are right there to take care of me!"

Jack grunted scornfully.

He picked up the overcoat from the floor. As he did so, he discovered a piece of white paper pinned to the lapel.

"Ha! Maybe this is the key to the mystery!" he cried, pouncing on it.

It was written upon by the same hand that had indited the note of the night before.

TO THE SECRETARY:

For Heaven's sake try to teach this addle-pate the danger of drinking with strangers. His foolishness to-night almost wrecked all our plans. We have saved him from the worst den of thugs in New York, not from any love of him, you may be sure, but because when the right time comes we mean to get him ourselves.

THE RED GANG.

"Oh, Lor'! Oh, Lor'! Oh, Lor'!" groaned Bobo. "What's the use? They'll get me anyhow!"

Jack laughed suddenly.

"What are you laughing at? I don't see anything to laugh at."

"Cheer up! This doesn't exactly mean what it says. I see it all now."

"What does it mean, then?" said Bobo.

"It means that your skin is worth five hundred a month to the Red Gang, and they've no notion of letting McGann's crew damage their property!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE GIRL WITH THE MOLE.

BOBO was of a very elastic temperament. The pot of coffee quickly completed his restoration. "Say," he said, "I feel all right now. I've got a clean shirt. It's not too late to go to Mrs. Cleaver's."

"Well," said Jack, "I was thinking you'd had enough company for to-night."

"She'll be sore if we don't come," said Bobo.

"Well, I don't mind. Put on your things and I'll telephone for the car to be sent back."

Mrs. Cleaver had a modest little house in the Murray Hill district. When Jack learned more about such things he appreciated her astuteness in thus setting up her banner in the stronghold of yesterday's aristocracy. The great people of day before yesterday still linger north of Washington Square, but they hardly count nowadays. A house on Murray Hill though, still gives its owner a cachet of exclusiveness that the grandest mansion up-town may lack.

The modest aspect of Mrs. Cleaver's house was limited to the Park Avenue façade. "My little house," she always called it. But once inside one was astonished by the great sweep of salon, hall, music-room. Below there was a billiard-room; above a library and a little salon. Strangers wondered where the inmates lived.

Jack and Bobo were not too late, for other cars were still rolling up to the door.

"None sweller than this outfit," Bobo remarked with satisfaction.

They trod a red carpet under a peppermint striped awning.

"Lord! What 'll we do when we get inside?" whispered Bobo in a sudden panic.

"Just drift on the current," said Jack. "I expect things will be made easy for us."

And they were. On the entrance floor there were cloak-rooms as efficiently run as those in a hotel—indeed the house was in all ways like a hotel. They presently found themselves mounting the main stairway without having made a break. The whole floor above was thrown into one room, and as they mounted a roar of polite conversation met them like an advancing wave.

A superb majordomo at the head of the stairs threw terror into Bobo's soul by demanding his name. Bobo stared at him dumbly, but Jack caught on and answered for both. Their names were bellowed to the roof.

"Mr. Norman!"

"Mr. Robinson!"

Mrs. Cleaver having allowed it to become known that the amazing young millionaire of a day, New York's latest sensation, might be expected, the sound of his name had an electrical effect. The conversational surf was stilled, as if by magic, and every face was turned toward the two young men.

Bobo, suddenly discovering that "society" people, of whom he had stood secretly in awe, were no harder to impress than those of the hotel, soared like a balloon. He advanced with languid eyebrows, lacking only the monocle to give a perfect imitation of his hero, the imported actor. Jack followed at his heels, smiling.

Mrs. Cleaver, leaving the greatest persons there, came swimming to meet them. Figuratively they rubbed their eyes at the

sight of her. She was one who went in frankly for hothouse effects. Her hair was the color of cherrywood stain, her cheeks tinted to match. Her dress was one of those outlandish creations one occasionally sees in the shop windows, just for an advertisement, one supposes.

"A beaded bib and a torn piano cover!" Jack described it to himself.

Jack naturally had to content himself with the briefest of nods from their hostess. Her heavy ammunition was reserved for Bobo.

"How good of you to come! I hardly dared hope—on such short notice! I hope I am the first to present you to the great world. Everybody is here to-night. But I'm not going to introduce you to a soul until I've had you to myself for a while!" *et cetera, et cetera.*

Pausing only long enough to unload Jack on a neglected female sitting in the corner, she carried Bobo off. She was still gushing like the great geyser, and Bobo had nothing to do but fiddle in his waistcoat pockets, and incline a languid attentive head, a part he played to perfection. Jack had no anxiety on his account. Whatever breaks he made, they would simply call him an "original." Was he not eighty times a millionaire?

Jack discovered that his companion, like many a neglected female, was not without spice.

"A queer gang, isn't it?" was her opening remark.

"I don't know," said Jack; "haven't had a chance to give 'em the once-over yet."

"You don't look as if you belonged," she said with a sharp look. "You look almost human."

"Oh, you're too discerning. How did you get here yourself?"

"I'm not human. A girl of my attractions can't afford it. I'm Sonia Kharkov."

"I wouldn't have thought it of you."

"Everything's Russian nowadays. I write poems about surgical operations. My last was entitled 'Appendectomy.'"

"How thrilling! Sorry I never read any."

"Oh, I don't publish. I only talk about them. It gets me many a good meal."

"Well, you're a good sport," said Jack.

More than an hour passed before Jack caught sight of Bobo again. In the mean time he was parted from the poetess, and the deafening clamor began to weary him.

"There's enough hot air let out here to fill one of the Consolidated gas-tanks," he had said to the poetess.

"Yes, but it's not illuminating gas," she had retorted.

He reflected that he would most likely run across Bobo in the vicinity of the refreshments, and, conducting an investigation, he discovered an excellent buffet supper set forth in one of the rooms below. Sure enough Bobo presently drifted in here.

"Where have you been?" asked Jack.

"Oh, Mrs. Cleaver took me up to the library, where she receives a few of the principal guests," he drawled.

"My word!" said Jack, fixing him with an imaginary monocle.

The sarcasm was lost on Bobo. He exhibited a new preoccupation. He had a far-away gaze, and ever and anon he heaved a sigh. Even his appetite was affected. He ate nothing at all; not a thing except a couple of *vol au vents* of chicken livers, a helping of lobster Newburgh, a handful of sandwiches, a cup of punch or two, and a plate of *petits four*.

"Come away, I want to talk to you."

They found an unoccupied corner under the stairs, and lit cigarettes.

"I'm in love!" announced Bobo.

"No!" said Jack.

"S a fact! The real thing! Bowled me right over! Floored me! I feel—I feel all gone here!" He laid a plump hand on the pit of his stomach.

"You need nourishment," said Jack. "Come on back!"

"Don't josh me! This is serious. I'm completely changed. I feel as if I never wanted to eat again. Her name is Miriam Culbreth."

"Um-yummie!" said Jack.

"She's the most beautiful girl in the whole world. The moment I laid eyes on her I knew it was all up with me. No other girl ever made me feel like that. And the wonderful part of it is she took to me right off the bat."

"H-m!" said Jack cynically.

Bobo never heeded. "We started right in talking as if we had known each other for years. We found out that we both like the same things. I never met a girl that understood me so well. She said she admired me."

"Discriminating!" murmured Jack.

"Such eyes!" sighed Bobo. "When she looks at you like this through her lashes you feel—you feel as if you were going up in an airplane. And she has the nature of a child!"

"What are your intentions toward this sweet child?"

"Intentions! No man could have any but the most honorable intentions toward her!"

"Sure! Then how are you going to support her in the style to which she has been accustomed?"

"Oh, she's well fixed! You should see the way she dresses!"

"Be careful! The best-dressers are poor girls. It's a life and death matter with them. This girl is displaying her goods on the basis of eighty million. You can't honestly accept it for less."

"There isn't a mercenary thought in her head. If she ever marries it will be for love alone. She told me so herself. You don't understand her. She's as simple and natural as—as a wild flower!"

"I haven't noticed many wild flowers around here."

"She isn't like these people. She's different from other girls."

"Did she tell you that too?"

"Why, yes, how did you know?"

"They generally do."

"You must come and meet her. I told her about you."

"What?" asked Jack sharply.

"I mean, I told her I had had the luck to secure a secretary, who was a very clever fellow, and could do everything for me."

"Now that was nice of you!"

"Come on up to the library and I'll introduce you."

"But I'm not one of the distinguished guests."

"That's all right. Mrs. Cleaver said I was to treat the house as if it was my own!"

Bobo paused only long enough to snatch another mouthful or two, and they made their way up two flights of the broad stairs. On the main floor the racket was undiminished, though it was long past midnight. Somewhere in the distance one seemed to be frantically sawing on a violin, but it was impossible to be sure. On the floor above the groups were smaller, and one had a pleasant sense of rising above pandemonium.

Bobo led the way into the front room. In the corner a lovely lady reclined in a low basket chair filled with cushions. Three cavaliers were in attendance. Quick to spot the approach of newcomers, she dismissed the three with charming insolence.

"Run along, boys! I'm tired of you now!"

The departing ones greeted the arrivals with no friendly glances.

Jack could not but commend Bobo's taste in beauty. The girl was indeed lovely to look at. She had great brown eyes capable of working havoc in the most inured male heart, an exquisite naturally pale complexion, and a glorious crown of chestnut hair. She was enveloped in slinky draperies of black silk, and her ankles were truly poetic.

But when she began to talk Jack did not feel obliged to alter the opinion he had formed of her in advance. There was nothing simple about her—or rather her simplicity was the effect of well-nigh perfect art. Jack was not much more experienced in these matters than Bobo, but he had a healthy instinct of incredulity.

Her method with Jack was much more subtle than with Bobo, and she had no objection whatever to letting Jack see that it was. It was part of her system of delicate flattery to allow him to understand that she recognized him at once as of a superior intelligence to Bobo. Jack was flattered, of course, but she made a mistake with him at the start that spoiled all her work with him. It never occurred to her that Jack might be honest at heart.

No man, however safeguarded, could escape the effect of her beauty. For Jack there was but one woman in the world, but even his breast was shaken by a sudden lift of the brown eyes. They had a mys-

terious haunting beauty, which even their bigness and softness was not sufficient to explain. Jack, when he had an opportunity to look closer, saw that they were not brown at all, but hazel; that is to say gray, with a rim of brown around the iris. It was the effect of these strangely-colored eyes looking through curved black lashes that moved men to reckless deeds.

Her conversation was not clever. It had no need to be. If she had recited the Thirty-nine Articles, Bobo would have hung on her lips entranced. Jack was too busy trying to explore the mystery of her real self, to pay much attention to what she chose to give out.

"Hazel eyes!" he was thinking. "Where have I heard of another girl with hazel eyes? Oh, yes, it was the pretty stenographer who tried to spy on Silas Gyde. She had chestnut hair too and a mole inside her right forefinger. I don't suppose these tapering fingers ever jarred the keys."

"What are you thinking of, Mr. Robinson?" Miss Culbreth asked in silvery tones. "I declare you are one of those dreadful men that bore you through and through with their eyes and never utter a word to any one."

"I'd rather bore you with my eyes than with my conversation."

"Mercy! Clever, too! I'm frightened to death of you!"

"Didn't I tell you he was clever?" put in poor Bobo, without at all appreciating what was going on.

"The worst of it is," said Miss Culbreth, "that the men who won't talk are those who really have something to say."

This was accompanied by the shadow of a disdainful glance in Bobo's direction and a warm flash toward Jack, the suggestion being: "One has to humor the stupid rich, but one enjoys oneself with the witty poor!"

Jack was flattered through and through, but at the same time he was thinking: "She's a regular man-eater. I'll have to watch out for poor Bobo."

"You don't approve of me," she said, casting down the lovely eyes.

"Indeed I do," Jack protested. "What you mistake for disapproval is quite another feeling."

"And what is that?"

"Instinct of self-preservation!"

"Are women so dangerous?"

"Not all women."

Her bold, pleased glance at Jack said: "We can have fun right under his stupid nose, can't we?"

But Bobo was growing restless, and she turned to him promptly, as befitted a prudent, marriageable girl. "You were gone an awfully long time," she complained.

Bobo grinned like the Cheshire cat. "Did you miss me?"

She answered him with a long glance that visibly made his head reel. This was followed by a flash of intelligence in Jack's direction signifying: "This is the sort of thing I'm obliged to hand out to them."

"Lord! But she's a conscienceless lovely devil!" thought Jack grimly. "I'd like to teach her a lesson. Anyhow, I'm hanged if I'm going to let her make me a party to her game with Bobo."

So he made a careless excuse and left them. Bobo did not mind, of course, but an ugly shadow flitted over Miss Culbreth's fair countenance.

Jack returned to the lower floor where he could smoke and watch the crowd undisturbed. He had not been there long before Bobo came down-stairs considerably agitated.

"Have you seen her?" he asked.

"Who?"

"Miriam — Miss Culbreth," he said, blushing. "We started down-stairs to the refreshment-room together, but I lost her somehow in the crowd. Can't find her anywhere."

"She will find herself when she wishes to, I expect," said Jack calmly.

"Maybe she's gone on in," said Bobo hopefully. He disappeared into the refreshment-room.

As soon as he had gone a footman who had been standing near approached Jack. "Mr. Robinson?" he asked.

Jack nodded.

"Miss Culbreth sent me for you, sir. Will you please come with me."

It was a point of pride with Jack never to be surprised at anything. With a nod he followed the man. They avoided the

stairs, and were raised to the upper regions in a tiny elevator concealed behind the wainscoting. The young lady was found in still another part of the house, a dainty silk-paneled room at the back, and she was alone there with a tempting supper—spread for two. The footman evaporated.

"I was so hungry," she said, waving him to the seat opposite, "and I couldn't face the crowd down-stairs. They paw one so! So I had it brought up here, and sent for you to keep me company."

"You make pretty free in the house," thought Jack.

"I live here," she said, as if she had read his thought. "Mrs. Cleaver is my cousin. Do you mind my sending for you?" she said meltingly.

"Mind!" said Jack. "I most certainly do! I shall return at once." And he sat down.

She laughed. "I like you, you're so unexpected. A little while ago you piqued my curiosity so I couldn't rest without seeing you again." This was said with the wide-eyed seeming simplicity that was her trump suit. "You so plainly did not like me! And most people do!" This with an adorable, deprecating shrug.

"I did like you!" Jack protested with an inscrutable face. "I liked you so much I felt I had to be very, very careful!"

"Don't be careful!" she murmured, turning on the full fire of those terrible eyes. "I despise careful men!"

Jack kept a prudent hold on himself. "I have no choice," he said calmly. "How long would I hold my job if I was not—well, careful?"

"You're afraid!" she said with provoking scorn.

He shrugged.

"Is it true he has a hundred million?" she asked idly.

"You can't prove it by me. I'm only his secretary."

"But you do everything for him. He depends on you absolutely. Anybody can see that."

Jack declined to be drawn into a discussion of Bobo.

"How long have you known him?" she asked.

"Oh, quite a while!" he said vaguely. He could not tell what mythical details of their past Bobo might have given her.

"What a responsibility it will be on you—looking after all that money and everything."

"Oh, the executor and the lawyer will take care of all that!"

"Who is his lawyer?"

"*What does she want to know that for?*" thought Jack. She had overdone the carelessness with which she asked it. He gave her a fictitious name, and looked at her with a new interest. At the moment her profile was turned toward him, and the way the light fell on it certain lines of weariness were shown up. She looked older than she had seemed at first.

Jack thought: "Mr. Gyde said that too of the stenographer who worked for him. This is more than a coincidence. Wouldn't it be amazing if—"

"What do you think of me?" she asked with a direct challenge. "I can see that you're revolving me in your head all the time."

"Well, you do make a man dizzy," he parried.

"No, I'm serious. How would you describe me if you had to?"

"Honest I don't know!"

"Come now, you're a great reader of character. You're always studying people and trying to figure them out to yourself."

"Am I?" said Jack. He had a sudden idea. "They say there's more character in people's hands than in anything else," he said carelessly.

"Read mine," she said, extending a white and tapering member. It was the left hand she offered.

"It must always be the right hand."

She gave it him.

"I'll read character until the cows come home if you'll let me hold it!"

"Go on! And no nonsense!"

"Have you ever operated a typewriter?" he asked slyly.

"No. Why do you ask?" she asked sharply.

"Oh, nothing! This hand looks to be capable of anything."

"But my character?"

"Ambitious, luxury-loving, and cruel!" he began mockingly.

She snatched the hand away. "Horrible! You're no character-reader!"

But he had had time to see what he was looking for: on the inside of the index finger was a large pale mole, round in shape, and as big as the button on a woman's glove.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

A U R E O L A

BY THOMAS WALSH

THE stars fall down from heaven,
And leave no trail behind;
The roses blush on every bush,
Then scatter to the wind.

And dreams of childhood vanish
As sunshine from the day;
On every tree a bird sings free,
And lightly flies away.

But an unending glory
Has made my life divine;
For I have seen thine eyes serene,
And they have gazed in mine.

The Pirate Woman by Captain Dingle

Author of "The Coolie Ship," "Steward of the Westward," etc.

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

ON the death of Red Jabez, Dolores, "a glowing creature of beauty and passion," took over her father's rule of the pirates of the Maroon coast of Jamaica.

With the help of her faithful slave, Milo, the Abyssinian giant, she crushed a rising insurrection among her ritrañ subjects, whose cupidity had been played upon by Rufe, the Spaniard.

But Dolores was herself the victim of discontent. Loathing her outlaw subjects and the island, she determined to seize the first boat that passed her way, and escape with her jewels and her gold.

When the pleasure yacht, *Feu Follette*, came that way, she sent Milo and her maid, Pascherette, to decoy Rupert Venner and his guests, Craik Tomlin and John Pearse, to the island.

In the midst of her reception to her captive-guests, she beheld Rufe and a band of insurgent blacks and mulattoes attacking the crew of the schooner, while Sancho, whom she had despatched to care for the vessel while in the harbor, was joining in the attack.

Then she rushed over the cliff and into the water, and boarded the boat, followed by her loyal Milo.

After a long and bloody struggle, the woman's ruse of firing the ship with a keg of powder won the day, and Rufe and Sancho fled into the wilderness, while from the schooner's topmast flew the Sultana's own flag.

Demanding that the traitors, Rufe and Sancho, be rounded up, Dolores threw her three guests into chains, while she accused Pascherette of abetting the treason of Sancho.

Then Dolores turned to Venner with the offer of her love if he would sail away with her, having first despatched his friends. When the man, whose soul was racked with passion for the beautiful black panther, recoiled from her condition, she left him in his chains.

Next she dealt with Sancho, whom Pascherette had lured back to the woman's mercy; and Sancho emerged from Dolores's presence a driveling imbecile.

When Milo beheld at this moment the fleeing form of Yellow Rufe, made distinguishable by vivid lightning, Dolores determined to complete her punishments.

The Spaniard was making good his escape when Milo took up the pursuit in the little sail-boat. Dolores and her crew would follow, by the light of his flares, in the schooner.

With the untamed soul of a woman who had never known defeat, Dolores drove her crew and defied the wind and the waves, and the *Feu Follette* was liberated from the mud and swung to the gale as the cry rang out: "There's the flare—and she's burnin' steady!"

CHAPTER XIV.

YELLOW RUFÉ'S FINISH.

"**H**OW bears the flare?" Dolores demanded, steadying the helm.

"Three points on lee-bow!" came from aloft.

"Sing out when we point for it!" Do-

lores gave the wheel a few spokes, and at her command the main-sheet was rendered until the schooner fell off from the wind, and Stumpy hailed: "Steady! She heads fair for it!"

"Does it still burn?"

"Aye, blazing bright! And low down, too, for the seas hide it every moment!"

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for November 2.

"Keep thy eyes skinned, and seek for the sloop, too."

The schooner came to a more even keel as she squared away from the gale, and the splendid speed of the craft sent a thrill through Dolores, as through the less impressionable pirate of the gang. Fast as Rufe's sloop was, this dainty plaything of wealth and leisure sped over the snarling seas at a gait that promised to overhaul the smaller vessel two fathoms to one.

Even Rupert Venner and his friends, shivering with the wet and sudden change from the cabin to the deck though they were, found much to soothe them in the glorious sweep and swing of the *Feu Follette*; much to admire and envy in the perfect poise and *sang froid* of the magnificent creature at the wheel.

Dolores stood on feet as steady as the great, deep eyes that were fixed on the compass-card before her. Her heavy, lustrous hair streamed about her from under the golden circlet; in each lightning flash she stood out, a thing of wild, awful beauty; the rain glistened on her bare shoulders and arms, rendering her golden skin a gleaming, fairylike armor. And the blustering wind caught her wet tunic and wrapped it about her closely and tightly, revealing every grace and glory of her perfect body.

"Saints! Was there ever such a creature?" said Tomlin hoarsely.

Pearse's face was set and grim; he made no rejoinder. Venner, too, kept silent; but his eyes held venom as he glared at the speaker. Dolores suddenly raised her eyes from the binnacle, looked toward them as they crouched shivering in the lee of the deck-house-companion, and she, warm and glowing in a flimsy, wet garment, laughed mockingly, and called to them.

"I am forgetting what is due to my guests. Do ye feel cold? Will ye go below?"

And they, shivering and uneasy as they were, were content to shiver if only they might not lose sight of her. Their reply was unintelligible; neither would look at the others; yet their mumbled response was understood, and the girl laughed again, loud, ringing, and full of allure.

"Such courage comes only of true sea stock, my friends! I shall not forget this fortitude when I have done with the schooner."

"Flare close aboard!" roared Stumpy; then: "Seize my soul if I see the boat, though, mistress. Satan! Now the flare's gone out!"

"Whereaway?" cried Dolores shrilly. Big Milo was out there in the blackness.

"Right under the bows!" bellowed the lookout. "Luff, or bear away; ye'll run him down!"

And from the raging seas off the lee-bow came the deep, calm voice of Milo, unperturbed as if on dry land, though no boat was to be seen in the murk. "Hold the course, Sultana, I am here!"

And on the heels of the words came a flash from the skies, blazing full upon the dripping figure of the giant as he reached a great arm up, gripped the lee-rail, and swung himself on board with the unconscious ease of a perfect athlete.

"Thy boat, Milo?" inquired Dolores.

"Sailed under, Sultana. I have held the flare aloft in my hand while swimming, until a moment ago, when the powder burned out."

"And Rufe?"

"The sloop is close by. Thou art sailing fair at his stern if thy course was not changed to avoid me. His topmast is gone; he sails slowly."

Then without more ado the splendid human animal clutched a backstay and swarmed aloft with the agility of an ape, showing not a whit of strain after his battle with the roaring seas. He reached Stumpy, sent that numbed mariner down, and searched the waters with his keen vision, waiting for another lightning flash. And when it came, fainter now as the thunderstorm receded, his resonant voice boomed down:

"Broad abeam the sloop lies! She runs before the wind!"

"Slack away the main-sheet!" cried Dolores, heaving the helm up. "Hail every minute, Milo!"

"Shall I send him a shot immediately, lady?" roared Hanglip, at the schooner's foremost gun.

"Hold with thy shots, villain! Does Rufe deserve no sport? Stand by with the grappling-hooks. I'll run him down!"

"The sloop is dead ahead!" hailed Milo, though none on deck could detect anything of her in the blackness. Dolores listened intently; then twirled the wheel, and cried: "I hear her! Ready the grapnels?"

"Aye, ready!"

"Then watch—and heave!" she commanded; and with the suddenness of light the schooner swept around in a swift arc, the black shape of the flying sloop stood out against the angry sea crests, and the two vessels came together with a crash of timbers and a rattling of gear.

A distant rumbling of thunder succeeded a faint flash, and wind and rain came down with increased fury as if to balance the defection of the electric element. The darkness of Erebus fell upon the surging vessels, and men groped at the rails in a blind effort to make out a footing for boarding the sloop.

"Follow me; I want Yellow Rufe alive!" cried Dolores, leaving the wheel and springing to the bulwarks. Instinctively Peters stepped to the wheel, and as he passed his employer he leaned to whisper in his ear:

"Let them once leave these decks, sir, and we'll up hellum and away!"

Venner's eyes glittered at the prospect; but he could not see the faces of his friends; he could only hear Pearse's low tones beside him, and the mumbled words indicated no great agreement in the scheme. Uncertain, his mind confused between desire to escape and desire to see more of Dolores and her hidden cave of wonders, Rupert Venner hesitated in his decision; and in the next moment it was out of his power to decide. For Rufe, in desperation now, met the boarders at the rail, backed by his half-dozen crazed adherents, and murderous steel glittered dully against the inky sky.

"Beat down his cringing curs, but leave me Rufe!" cried Dolores, opposing her own dagger to the sweep of the pirate's cutlas. And as the schooner's crew roared at Hanglip's heels, storming over to the pitching sloop's decks to pursue mercilessly the

panic-stricken runaways, the girl pitted agility and splendid knife-craft against the terror-driven strength and wolfish fury of the trapped traitor.

"Hah! Thy black heart fails thee!" taunted Dolores, leaping down from the rail to the schooner's streaming deck and thus avoiding a whistling stroke of Rufe's cutlas. The pirate fell forward with the impetus of his blow, and stumbled in a heap at the girl's nimble feet. "Up, man!" she cried, leaping back to permit him to rise. "What, art afraid of a woman? Here, then, I prick thee! Now wilt fight?" She darted her dagger swiftly downward, and the partially healed cross on Rufe's cheek blazed red again.

"Woman or devil, I'll see thy heart for that!" swore the pirate, and rose with a bound and hurled himself at the girl. She stepped aside agilely and laughed mockingly at him, while as he again stumbled with the swing of his avoided blow she darted close, and her knife ripped his sword-arm from wrist to elbow.

Mouthing crazily with fury, Rufe leaped backward until his shoulders struck the rigging, and, seizing his cutlas in his left hand, he poised it by the blade for a deadly javelin cast.

Now upon the scene flared a great blaze, and Stumpy's scowling face appeared at the back of it. He, with readier wit than his fellows, had sought out a tar-pot and lamp; and at the moment his mistress stood defenseless before the impeding steel, the club-footed pirate poured lamp-oil into the tar, and cast the flaring wick on top of all.

A circle of light spread from wheel to foremast, with Yellow Rufe at the main rigging in the center of it. The light dazzled him for a second, and his throw was stayed. The three yachtsmen, huddled in their chains aft, stared in helpless amazement at the tableau; for such it became, when the fight stopped for a breath and every man's passion-filled face was lighted by the red glare.

"Shoot him down!" shouted Pearse in horror.

And Venner and Tomlin strove for words without success. Venner was dumb and sick in face of Dolores's peril. Yellow Rufe

uttered a grim, Satanic growl of laughter, and drew back his arm for the cast. His plight was utterly desperate; he knew death waited for him with clutching talons, and with his last breath he would reap toll that should make his name a thing to recall with dread afterward.

"This for thy witch's heart!" he howled, and his arm quivered. Then out of the shadows aloft, above the smoky flare, came down the tremendous shape of Milo, forgotten in his post at the masthead, but never taking his eyes from his Sultana.

Like a gorilla he slipped down the backstay with one hand; with the other hand he reached downward with a swift, sure clutch, and as Rufe's wrist flexed to cast his javelin Milo's hand gripped him by the neck from behind and swung him bodily off his feet, while the wide-flung cutlas flashed through the air and plunged with a hiss over the side.

"I thank thee again, Milo," said Dolores, slipping her dagger into the sheath and looking on at Rufe's struggles with the unconcern of one far apart from the actual conflict. "I wished to take him alive; yet had almost been forced to cut too deeply. Bring the villain to me. And, Caliban, get more flares, lanterns, lights, and make us a theater of justice here."

She stepped aft, saw Peters at the wheel, and smiled as she realized how her boarding of the sloop might have resulted.

"Hah, but it would have availed thee nothing!" she smiled at Venner. "I read thy heart as I read the stars, friend. Watch how completely Yellow Rufe pays his debt to me. He has fled me through forest and mountain; through a sea of howling storm; yet he pays. And thus all men pay who think to flout Dolores. Keep thy eyes wide, friends, and watch."

Yellow Rufe was brought before her, and his swarthy face was pallid in the red light. There was something of the splendid beast about this fellow, too; a quality that showed even when he faced certain death and no merciful one. He had run, and when overtaken he had fought; and now he must pay.

"Hanglip, to the wheel here!" Dolores commanded. "Six of you bring back the

sloop. The rest attend me! Bring the schooner to her course, northwest, Hanglip; and, Spotted Dog, rig me a whip at the foregaff-end. Yellow Rufe, pray or curse while ye may. Thy course is run. There is nothing left to say. Ten minutes remain to thee."

The doomed pirate stood in silence while the preparations were being made; but when Spotted Dog brought down the end of the rope he had rove through the block at the end of the gaff, and stood grinning anticipatively before Dolores, Rufe's tongue came loose, and he burst into a torrent of futile, raving blasphemy.

"Take the rope end forward, and pass it around the bows, so that the rope passes beneath the keel," Dolores ordered, and every eager villain in the band knew now what fate awaited Rufe. The schooner, not being square-rigged, was badly fitted for the operation of keel-hauling; but Dolores's inventive brain had devised a refinement of even that refinement of torture. She waited for the rope end, and when Spotted Dog brought it aft, on the weather side, passing clear from the gaff to leeward, under the keel and up to windward, she stood aside so that the yachtsmen could witness all.

"Tie his hands, Milo!" she said. It was carried out, in spite of Rufe's fierce fight against it. "Now place the noose about his throat tightly." That, too, was done, and now the rope led from Rufe's neck, over the weather rail, under the schooner, and up to the gaff. Three men stood by the hauling part of the rope, and at a gesture from the girl six others joined them. On every face was a little doubt, for none saw exactly what was coming, least of all Rufe.

"Now release him!" said Dolores quietly, and Rufe was left standing alone, his hands tied, but his feet unfettered. He glared around as if he saw a slim chance yet for life; the hope died the next moment, for Dolores signed to the men at the rope, they began hauling, and the terror leaped into Rufe's eyes afresh.

For a moment Venner and his friends saw what they imagined to be a piece of grim jesting; but they, as well as Rufe,

speedily saw there was no jest in this. For as the rope tightened, and other roaring ruffians ran joyously to take a pull at it, Rufe was drawn irresistibly toward the weather rail with a choking drag on his throat. He seized the rail, and strained with his every sinew to fight that deadly peril; the rope only tightened more; it was either go or strangle for him; fight as he might, he was forced to climb on the rail, to aid in his own funeral.

The yachtsmen turned dizzy with the awfulness of the man's end; but they could not take their fascinated eyes from the scene. They saw Rufe topple over the rail with a choking curse, and saw the rope pull him under the vessel; they saw the rope quiver to the pirates' lusty pull as the victim was battered against the keel. And they saw the terrible figure leap from the sea to leeward and fly to the gaff-end as the men ran away with the rope to a roaring chorus. But they saw no more. Their eyes refused to look at a repetition of that horror. And Dolores, watching them keenly, came to them, after giving final orders regarding Yellow Rufe's body, took their chains in her hand, and said:

"When again the thought comes to leave me, gentlemen, think well upon what I have showed thee. Now come below. I owe thee some refreshment after a night of storm. 'Twill be approaching dawn ere the schooner can beat back to my haven. Come. I will serve thee with supper."

CHAPTER XV.

THE FIRES OF THE FLESH.

IN the schooner's saloon the atmosphere was peaceful by contrast with the hurly-burly outside; yet even here the steep slant of the deck, the shrill, protesting squeal of working frames and beams, the sullen thud and swish of racing seas along the vessel's skin, kept the storm ever in mind: the dizzy plunge of the bows into great gray seas, with its accompanying rise of the stern and the hollow jar and thump of the rudder-post in its port, kept the interior humming with sound as from a distant organ.

Again chained to the mainmast, the three yachtsmen stood gloomily regarding Dolores, whose capable, battle-wise fingers now performed a task more in keeping with her sex and charm. Under the great swing-lamp in the skylight she leaned over the table, mixing wine in low, stout cups, spreading a silver salver with food from the pantry. And a thrilling picture she made in the soft glow of the lamp. The beautiful face was warm with color; the scarlet lips were slightly opened in a brilliant smile; intent upon her task, she swayed with superb grace to the tremendous lurches of the driving schooner, ignoring all outside affairs.

Her preparations completed, she placed tray and cups at the end of the table nearest the mainmast, turned around the deep armchair which had been the owner's own, and sat down, offering a cup and the tray with a little laugh of satisfaction.

"Come, friend Rupert," she said, thrilling Venner again with her vibrant voice, "thou shalt be first. Eat—and drink. See, for thee I do this." She raised the cup to her lips, and kissed the brim, fixing her fathomless eyes full on Venner as she did so.

He struggled with his feelings for a moment, and hated himself heartily for even debating his attitude. But he fell, as he had done before, dazzled by her witchery. His eyes blazed, his blood teaped, and he took the cup with a mumbled attempt at thanks. Dolores smiled at his confusion, and in that smile was the allure of a Circe.

Venner's expression became less tense as he noted the faces of his fellows; for in their eyes he read jealousy, rank and stark, and it warmed him to the marrow. In the next instant his warmth rose to fever heat, and malice twisted his features; Dolores had taken another cup, and now she offered it to Pearse, with a smile yet more gracious than before.

"My silent friend, here's to thee, too," she murmured. His cup she kissed twice, and presented it carefully so that the place she kissed was against his lips. "Drink. I have sweetened it."

As Venner's brows darkened, so did John Pearse conquer his first flush of self-

contempt and put on a smile that irradiated his usually serious face. And Tomlin brightened, too, waiting in what patience he could muster for his turn, which must come next. To him Dolores turned, cup in hand, and rising at the same time gave him his wine with a brief: "Here, drink, too. I must leave thee a while."

She forced the cup into Tomlin's trembling fingers, gave him never a glance, but went out of the saloon on her errand.

When he realized she was gone, Craik Tomlin dashed down the wine like a petulant boy, and cursed deeply and fiercely. And not until then did Venner and Pearse awake to the true artistry of the woman; for here, instead of making of Tomlin a raging foe, willing to plot with all the power of his alert brain for their ultimate release, she had aroused a demon of black jealousy in him which promised to set all three by the ears.

Restricted as their movements were, they were forced to nurse whatever feelings Dolores had implanted in them in full sight of each other. And Tomlin left no doubt as to his feelings. At the farthest scope of his chain he flung himself down on the slanting floor and crouched there with dull-glowing eyes bent loweringly upon his friends. Venner laughed awkwardly, and glanced at Pearse; the laugh died away and left a silence between them that was vividly accentuated by the manifold voices of the laboring vessel. For in the swift meeting of eyes, John Pearse and Venner, host and guest, friends to that moment, saw in each other an established rival, a potential foe. Involuntarily they drew apart; and when Dolores returned from the deck she found them spread out like star rays, having nothing in common except a common center.

She gave no sign that she noticed them; but her heavy, fringed lids drooped over eyes brimming with gratification. As she stepped from the stairs the schooner swung upright, the deck overhead thundered to the slamming of booms as she came about, and then the cabin sloped the other way, rolling the scattered wine-cups noisily across the floor. Neither man looked up; but Tomlin's cup rolled so that it struck

his foot, and he gave voice to a deep oath, terrible in its uncalled-for savagery. Then Dolores gave them outward notice for the first time.

With a low, pleasant laugh, she stepped quickly to Tomlin's side, laid a hand on his sullen head, and forced him to look up at her.

"I owe thee something, friend," she smiled, and Tomlin flushed hotly under her close regard. "I treated thee badly in my haste. Come"—she went to the sideboard, filled another cup with wine, and came back, kneeling before Tomlin in the attitude of a slave while her big eyes blazed full into his.

"Drink, for I like thee best," she whispered, sipping the wine and putting the brim, warm from her lips, to his.

And Tomlin drank deeply, greedily, trembling under her close proximity. He felt her hand take his chain, heard the tinkle of links, and knew, without seeing, that she had unlocked his fetters and he was free.

"Now sit here with me, and thou shalt tell me about thy world, my friend, the world thou shalt take me to."

Her soft, thrilling voice set Tomlin's blood leaping; and as she spoke she led him to Venner's great chair and sat him down in it. Then, facing at the length of the table her other two captives, she stood behind the big chair, her arms on the top, leaning low to Tomlin's ear, her lips almost brushing his cheek.

And she whispered to him musically, seductively; her jeweled fingers played with his hair; the soft, warm skin of her arms slid over his neck and face; when, in a frenzy, he reached impulsively for her hand and gripped it, she laughed yet more deliciously and permitted him to hold it.

"Why must you seek another world, Dolores?" Tomlin said hoarsely. "Here you are queen. Out in the greater world you can be no more. Stay, and let me stay with you."

"And would my paltry possessions pay thee for renouncing thy people, thy home?" she asked.

"Home? People? God! I renounce Heaven itself if you say yes!"

"We shall see, my friend," Dolores sighed, and Tomlin felt her tremble slightly. "My chief desire is to leave behind me this life of herder to human beasts. To go into the world whence comes such as thee, Tomlin; to live among the people who can make such as these"—she indicated the rich furnishing of the saloon, the sideboard silver and plate, the stained glass of the skylight.

"All these things I have, and more—nay, but thy treasures are nothing compared with what I shall show thee in the great chamber—yet must I keep them hidden because of the beasts that call me *Sultana*! Where they came from, these treasures, must be men like thee, Tomlin, women like the painted women of my gallery, people with the art to make these things instead of the brute power to steal them. And there I will go, and thou art to be my guide."

"Then, in Heaven's name, let us go now!" cried Tomlin, trying to rise. She laughed in his ear again, and her soft, warm arms pressed him back in the chair with a power that amazed him. "We shall go, in good season," she whispered. "But—" The rest was murmured so faintly, yet so tremendously audible to his superheated brain, that he drew back and stared up at her with an awful expression of mingled unbelief and horror distorting his face.

"Do you know what you say?" he gasped, and shot an apprehensive glance toward Venner and Pearse.

"Surely, my friend," she crooned. "Thyself alone, of those who came in this ship, may return. If I am desirable, see to it that I can be pleased with thee." Dolores stood up, bent upon him a dazzling smile, leaned as if to kiss his lips, then with a tinkling little ripple of mirth blew a kiss instead and ran up the companion-stairs to the deck.

Tomlin stood glaring after her as if fascinated. His face, deeply flushed a moment before, had gone deathly white; his profile, turned under the lamp toward his companions, showed deeply puckered brows over stony eyes, lips parted as if to utter a cry of horror. And Venner, fuming in-

wardly, had seen enough to recall some of his badly scattered wits. He called Tomlin by name hoarsely, softly, and exclaimed when he looked around:

"Tomlin, shall we three be ruined body and soul by that sorceress? Come, help us out of these chains, and we will make a bid for liberty. We can reach Peters and such men as are left, by way of the alleyway to the forecandle; I know where weapons are to be got, and we'll put our fate on the cast. Come. Pearse is of a like mind, eh, Pearse?"

Pearse did not reply at once, and Tomlin saved him the trouble; for, recovering himself with a shudder, he put a hand on the companion-rail and started up the stairs with a laugh of contempt.

"I have no concern with your troubles, Venner," he said. "As for liberty, I am free as air. I believe patience is the medicine you need."

Tomlin reached the deck with tingling ears, for even Pearse came out of his reverie to curse him. But curses or benedictions counted nothing at that moment. In every patch of light he saw Dolores's devilishly lovely face; in every swing of the vessel he saw her consummate grace; he was a thirsty man seeking a spring, knowing full well that a draft must kill him. He stood alone outside the companionway, wondering at the absence of people, at the absence of Dolores. A solitary man stood at the wheel; and, looking around for others, Tomlin noticed vaguely that the black storm was broken, that watery stars were winking down, and that almost in the zenith a gibbous moon leaned like a brimming dipper of quicksilver, ready to drop from the inky cloud that had but just uncovered it.

Then voices reached his ears from forward, voices full of wondering anger, and he stepped out clear of the deck-house and peered ahead on the windward side. There, two miles away, the land loomed black and forbidding; and high up, on a crest, a great red blaze leaped and swirled against the flying clouds.

As he stood, Dolores ran aft, ignoring him utterly in her haste. Her men grouped themselves along the waist of the schooner,

waiting for commands. The Feu Follette was already doing her best; that is, the best under such sail as was safe to carry. But there, to windward, and yet two miles distant, some part of the pirate village was burning, and none might say yet what part it was.

The one thing certain was that it could not be the great chamber. That was of rock; it might be destroyed by an explosion; never by fire. So there was a ring of exultation in Dolores's tone when she sent the hail along:

"Loose both topsails and set them! Caliban, thou small villain, out and loose the outer jib. Main-sheet here! Oh, haul, bullies! Flat—more yet—so, belay!"

Then the girl flung the man from the wheel, seized the spokes herself, and began to nurse the schooner to windward with truly superhuman art. Closer yet she brought the graceful craft; closer, until the luffs trembled and the seas burst fair upon the stem and volleyed stinging spray the full length of her. And as she drew nearer, the blaze seemed to diminish and blaze afresh as if fire-fighters were there indeed, but lacking weapons to fight with.

"Is it the treasure-house?" Tomlin asked anxiously, stepping beside the girl. She stood in deep shadow; the dim radiance from the lighted binnacle touched her face, breast, and arms with soft light, and her eyes, as they flashed swiftly toward the man, glittered with some subtle quality that sent a shiver running down his spine.

"Treasure-house?" she repeated, and her voice was no longer soft and alluring; it was metallic and menacing. For the second time, first in Venner, now in Tomlin, she had seen the true source of their fascination. "No, it is not the treasure-house. It is the council hall, where thou wert lodged." She snatched her gaze from the compass and fixed him with the cold, unwinking stare of a snake. "Where thou wert lodged, my friend who would renounce all for me. Where, had I cared to, I might have left two of ye, taking with me to safety only the one whose brains are not afire with soulless gold and jewels."

Tomlin grew hot and uneasy. "My brain is on fire with your beauty, Dolores,"

he returned, trying to force her gaze to meet his again.

"Prove it to me, then," she replied shortly, and waved him away, devoting her attention now to making the anchorage, already close to.

CHAPTER XVI.

PEARSE ENTERS THE CAVE OF ALADDIN.

LUCKY it proved that Pascherette had been left behind when the schooner sailed after Yellow Rufe. Even Dolores, with all her consummate wisdom, had forgotten the existence of the old woman she had degraded to kitchen drudge; still more utterly had she forgotten the relationship existing between the old woman and the late victim of her terrible vengeance.

Sancho had called the old crone mother, whether with blood reasons or not none knew. And at bottom, much of Sancho's rebellion had come of anger at the treatment meted out to her. And it was Sancho's despairing cry, when Milo cast him out into the Grove, that brought the old woman from her concealment in the forest. The awful plight of the unlucky wretch had aroused in the woman's withered breast a demon of revenge that knew no limits; and the departing schooner, then barely visible to her, filled her brain with the knowledge that the strangers who came in that vessel had been the indirect cause of her Sancho's fate.

She knew they had been placed in the cells behind the council hall; she knew nothing of Dolores's last-minute decision that had taken them with her. She knew nothing as to who or how many were left in the camp; but she knew, she had terrible and ever-present proof in that moaning, groping, brainless thing that was Sancho, that her mistress had shown a leaning toward the strangers at the expense of her own people, and that she herself might expect no mercy if ever caught. And with the low animal cunning that served her for intellect she knew her penalty could be no greater if she struck one blow in revenge before taking to the woods in final flight.

Her plan was simple. Watching Sancho for a while, so that she might not lose him, she searched for dry wood among the drenched underbrush, piled it against the rear of the council hall, and set fire to it, fanning the faint flame and feeding it, guarding it with her scanty garments, until the red tongues shot up in a powerful, self-supporting conflagration.

Then she had darted back to the forest fringe, found Sancho, and turned his sightless, blank face toward the blaze so that he might feel the warmth and guess the cause. But she knew nothing of his cracked brain; she knew only of his physical agonies; the utter absence of interest in him when she would have shown him what she had done shook her to the foundations of her own reason; and her eldritch scream pealed up among the trees as she flung her arms aloft and cursed the place.

It was the scream that brought Pascherette out of the hut, where she sheltered from the storm, to see the council hall in flames. It was the scream that told the little octoroon where the fire had birth. And Pascherette, too, believed that the three strangers were still within the cells. She had plans of her own that required the safety of those men, at least for a while. And her active brain gave her the solution before the old woman had ceased to curse.

Like a small, sleek panther Pascherette ran toward the old woman; she saw Sancho, too, but instinctively knew that after Milo's treatment of him he could not be dangerous; ignoring the man, she drew her knife as she ran, and with a brief, panting, "That for thee, witch!" struck the old woman down at Sancho's stumbling feet.

Now she gave all her energies to subduing the fire; and, swiftly rallying every man or woman in the camp she drove them with blows and shrill invective to beating the blaze with sodden boughs and wet sand. She set men with poles to batter down the doors to the cells; but the doors had been built to oppose that kind of entry. Frantically she drove the fire-fighters to another place, while she heaped up fresh fire against the doors in the hope of burning down what could not be burst. And it was the last up-blazing shaft of fire as the doors

fell that Dolores saw in the moment she brought the schooner to anchor. Pascherette was emerging, singed and blackened, with dark rage in her glittering eyes at having found the cells empty, when Dolores and her crew arrived on the scene with Venner and Tomlin and Pearse in their midst.

"What! Pascherette again?" cried Dolores, glaring at the girl with red suspicion in her face. "Is this thy work? Speak!"

Pascherette stared in surprise at the three strangers, and her painfully scorched lips strove to answer. Her throat was dry, and at first words refused to come. But in the pause, when fifty faces glowered at the girl, something stumbled across the open in the firelight, and Milo's sharp vision distinguished it. He went up to Pascherette, with deep concern in his devoted eyes, and laid a strong arm about her trembling shoulders. She relaxed toward him, and managed to whisper to him. He flung out his free hand toward the open space, and cried to Dolores:

"There is the traitor, Sultana! This is the avenger."

Dolores looked; every eye was turned where Milo pointed; and the brutal laughter of some of the hardiest pirates mingled with the groans of the three yachtsmen, whose escape from a horrible death by fire could not reconcile them to the staggering vengeance that had overtaken the wretch who had attempted that death. Bathed in an infernal glow, grotesque as a creature of a diseased brain, the unhuman Sancho staggered across the glade and into the darkness of the forest, bearing in his handless arms a ghastly burden in which the hilt of Pascherette's dagger glittered and flashed as the firelight touched it.

"Back! Let him go!" cried Dolores; and a score of shouting ruffians returned from swift pursuit, leaving Sancho and his burden to pass into the oblivion of the great forest.

Milo examined the damage, and reported. The cells were useless now, except merely to confine captives. They did not fit in with Dolores's plans thus, and she sent Milo to a distance with John Pearse while she carried into effect a new fancy.

Her crew had gone to their own places, to soothe the fatigues of their night's work in carousal; Pascherette stood near by, gazing at her mistress with mute appeal that she, too, be permitted to seek alleviation of her own sore burns.

"Wait, child," said Dolores, seeing the girl's trouble. "I'll cure thy hurts soon."

Then she separated Venner and Tomlin, taking each in turn to a vacant hut. And to each she whispered patience and faith; to each her voice imparted a renewed thrill. To Venner she said:

"Thy anger with me was foolish, good Rupert. I did but smile at thy friends to make thy task easier. Now see; I leave thee unfettered, and thus." She drew his head down and lightly kissed his hair, laughing with a little tremor: "Think of what I asked of thee, Rupert. To-morrow I shall ask thy decision."

In turn to Tomlin she whispered:

"The night has been arduous for thee. I was impatient with thee. Thy vow of devotion to me rang true, though I doubted it at the moment. To-morrow I will hear what thy heart speaks. To-night, see, I free thee. For thy own safety, though, do not venture beyond these doors save with me. My rascals are fierce creatures of jealousy and suspicion. Good night, friend." Him, too, she left tingling with her kiss, and whatever others in the camp did that night, two men found sleep elusive and vain.

Milo brought Pearse to her at her call, and together they went to the great stone before the chamber. Milo rolled back the rock, while his expression showed uneasiness. But he had learned his lesson when protesting against Pascherette's admission to the cave of mystery, and uttered no warning now.

Pascherette, in spite of her burns, bent a roguish face upon Pearse as that puzzled gentleman waited for some word or motion that should give him the reason for this unexpected favor.

Still Dolores said nothing. The rock rolled away, and Milo stood aside, she entered, touching Pearse on the arm as she passed him, and he followed meekly, Pascherette bringing up the rear with Milo after the giant replaced the great stone.

Then Dolores turned back to Pearse, under the soft, red glow of the unseen lamps, and flashed a bewildering smile upon him.

"Wilt believe now that I love thee?" she whispered, and her lids drooped over swimming eyes. "Beyond that great door lies the chamber to enter which costs death. Art afraid?"

"Lead on," replied Pearse hoarsely. There was no trace of fear in his voice or in his eyes; but Dolores warmed gladly to the knowledge that here at last was a man whose thoughts were bent upon her and not on her chamber of treasures.

They stood before the massive sliding door of plate and jewels, and here the human side in John Pearse showed through for an instant. Under the great, yellow lantern the gold and silver plates, the glowing rubies, the glinting emeralds, made a picture of fabulous riches that even he could not ignore. But at the upward slide of the door his eyes left the richness of it without a flicker; he waited for the heavy velvet hangings to be drawn, and when Dolores's eyes sought his they surprised his deep, ardent gaze fastened full on herself and not upon what might next be revealed.

"Enter, man of my heart," she smiled, and stood aside to permit him to pass.

In the first steps over the threshold John Pearse saw little save a dim, cool hall, vast and full of vagrant shadows; then, when Milo had arranged the lights so that they gradually grew in power, flooding the chamber with mellow radiance, his soul seemed to burst from his throat in one choking, stupefied gasp.

"The Cave of Aladdin!" he choked, and stood open-mouthed while Dolores laughed softly at his shoulder.

"Nay," she reproved. "'Tis the Cave of Dolores. 'Tis mine, and"—she turned her face up toward his alluringly—"may be thine, if thou'rt a true man!"

With shrewd artistry she twisted away as he strove to clasp her, and there she left him standing, in the midst of untold treasures that every moment were increasingly revealed to him. Without another glance for him, or apparently another thought, she took Pascherette by the hand and led her down the chamber to the great chair.

Here she busied herself with salves and lotions to assuage the scald of the girl's fresh burns, which were more painful than serious. And every moment she was thus charitably employed her gleaming eyes were fixed upon Pearse from under concealing lashes; every moment Milo's dusky face was bent upon her from the end of the chamber with an expression of absolute adoration and gratitude. For tiny Pascherette was custodian of the giant's green heart; and honest Milo never sought very deeply for motives. It was enough for him that Dolores, his Sultana, the being he worshiped as he worshiped his gods, was ministering with woman's infinite tenderness to her maid, a creature as humble as himself.

Pearse, too, even in his intoxication of senses, saw and warmed to this evidence of real womanliness in one he had small cause to think anything other than a bewilderingly alluring fury. He could not hide his thoughts, and Dolores saw them betrayed on his face; Pascherette surprised the look on her mistress's lovely face that told her the imperious beauty possessed a heart of living flesh and blood. And Pascherette shuddered nervously at the fear of what must happen should that heart ever feel humiliated.

"Keep still, child," Dolores laughed happily, mistaking the reason for the girl's shudder. "It is finished now. Thy hurts will pass in thy sleep. Go to thy big man there, and have him pet thee. I have no need of thee until I call. Go, take him away. I would be alone with my guest."

The girl ran to Milo, and together they went down to the gallery beyond the picture door. Then Dolores set out with her own fair hands wine and sweetmeats, the confections taken from the yacht, strange and new to her, but in her mind something desirable to such men as Pearse, else why had they brought such things? And again using her innate witchery, she set a chair for Pearse at a distance from her own, where she could look straight into his face or hide her own, as her fancy dictated.

"Hast seen the like before?" she smiled, looking at him over the brim of a chased gold flagon.

"Never, never, Dolores!" he said, and his eyes blazed into hers. He moved his chair close to her, and reached for her free hand.

"What! Hast thou no eyes for these things?" she exclaimed in simulated surprise, taking her hand away and indicating the wealth around the walls. "Man, thy eyes are idle; look at those gems, those paintings; hast ever seen the like of those 'Three Graces,' then, that they have no interest for thee?"

"Yes, I have seen the like, wonderful, wonderful being," he returned hoarsely. "You I have seen; you, you, I see nothing else but you, Dolores!"

She dazzled him with a seductive smile, full of fire-specked softnesses, and offered him her flagon.

"Drink, comrade. Drink here, and we shall talk of thee and me, and what concerns us both nearly. Art sure thy eyes are not blinded by the nearer beauty?"

"I am not blind! I never saw with clearer vision!" Pearse cried, taking the flagon with tremorless hand. "I care nothing for these tawdry gauds."

"Ah! Then thou'rt the man. Come, thy faithful soul deserves reward. Come, I will show thee treasures thou hast not dreamed of yet; and all shall be thine, with me—at a price."

CHAPTER XVII.

THE TREASURE TEST.

DOLORES gaily took John Pearse by the hand and led him down the chamber to the dais on which stood the vacant chair of state of the dead Red Jabez. The great canopied bed still stood there; but it was curtained in, out of sight, and unused; Dolores preferred her own low couch, with its strangely beautiful composite furnishings of silk and tiger-skins, velvet and snowy polar-bear rugs, heaped high with luxurious cushions that made it a restful lounge by day as well as a sleep-inviting couch by night.

Beside the couch, between it and the dais, Milo had set the treasure-chests, leaving the lids wide-flung, the contents but

thinly concealed by silken shawls. The end of a rope of matchless pearls hung over the edge of one chest carelessly, without apparent motive; yet when she guided Pearse to the couch and seated him, Dolores scanned his face with glinting eyes that peeped out through narrow slits. She saw his look of interest; then his mouth turned upward in a smile that said plainly: "Here is a theatrical trick to impress me!"

"Now thy reward is come," whispered Dolores, leaving him with an arch smile and kneeling before the big chests. She tore away the shawls and plunged her hands into the glittering hoard to the wrists, flinging out upon the couch and the floor, upon Pearse's knees and into his hands, rubies and emeralds, diamonds and pearls, golden chains and ornaments for the hair in a bewildering, stupendous litter. And, her face turned from him, her narrowed eyes were fixed upon him, and in their gleaming depths burned a smoldering anxiety that was nearing impatience.

For John Pearse cloaked his feelings better than his fellows; he smiled at the shower of riches, met her questing glance with a smile, and smiled again with shaking head when she stood before him, aglow with yearning for his decision, and asked simply:

"Well?"

"Baubles, playthings, Dolores!" he laughed up at her. He seized her hands, stroked the satin-skinned forearm, and said softly: "These are not worthy of such a woman as Dolores. These are but the gauds of a beautiful woman. To fit you, they should be the adornments of a goddess!"

"Oh, then thy lips uttered truth!" she cried delightedly. She stooped swiftly to him, twined her arms about his neck, and laid her warm cheek to his. "Now I shall show thee treasures indeed, my John!"

She ran to the one chest yet unopened, and flung away the silk covering. Here were the gems of the craftsman's art. Stones of unparalleled color and size were in this chest; but their chief merit lay in their cunning settings, their consummate delicacy of workmanship. Here the art collector might find his El Dorado; in all

the world such a collection could scarcely be found in one place. Here were shrines and temples, carved from single immense stones or pieces of jade; here was a woven thing of gold and silver, in which the warp and woof lay close as tapestry, portraying as no tapestry could portray it the fabled valley of "Sinbad," in which the sands were gold, the sky silver, and the gems were gems indeed.

"Is this to thy mind?" Dolores cried, tossing to him a golden ball which by some amazing internal mechanism played fairy chimes as it whirled through the air.

Her lips parted in flushed pleasure at the result of her display, for John Pearse was smitten with the collector's fever. He missed her ball through sheer inability to tear his eyes from the other treasures. And as his brain began to grasp the stupendous truth, to more readily estimate values, his eyes turned from the more gaudy works of art, and noticed, for the first time clearly, the pricelessness of many greater things of canvas and wood, ivory and glass, with which the apartment abounded.

"Now thy heart craves my treasures, too, eh?" she chided, gliding to him and laying a hand on his head. Yet she felt glad of his awakened interest. It was merely another card she might yet have to play.

"Astounding!" he gasped. His gaze fastened upon a boule bric-à-brac stand, on which stood an Aretine vase two feet high, of peerless form and glaze. The ticking of the great Peter Hele clock drew his attention to a work of ebony and ivory as scarcely could be believed as coming from man's hands.

"Now thou'rt of a kind with thy fellows!" she cried in anger. "Look at me! No, thy eyes will not deign to seek me now!"

Pearse snatched his eyes away, and answered her with a laugh that sent her blood leaping again.

"My Dolores forgets she demanded my admiration for her treasures," he said. "What would you have, splendid one? Shall I say these treasures are still paltry, when I see their countless worth? Still I say you are the treasure beyond price."

These are but a little more fitting for you. That is all. Am I forgiven?"

He leaped to his feet, seized her hand, and attempted to slip an arm about her waist. She, lithe as a leopard, slipped from his grasp with a glad laugh that rippled in a low murmur to his hot ears, and intensified the glare that had come into his eyes. She failed to see that glare. It was the glare of greed; stark and utter greed, that counted no cost and brooked no opposition in driving for its ends.

"Thou art forgiven indeed!" she replied, panting and disheveled, a thing of wondrous loveliness. "So far art thou forgiven that I shall put thy heart to the grand test at once. Of thy fellows none can compare with thee for scorn of wealth and desire of me. Sit down again, my man; let us reveal our inmost hearts to each other."

She told him, keeping him at provoking distance, of her heart-hunger for the outside world, the world of art and things of beauty. She thrilled him with her vibrant voice, mesmerized him with her distant, caressing touch and glorious, limpid eyes. She made his blood pulse hotly with desire with her soft-spoken offer of self-surrender to the man who should lead her from her sovereignty over human beasts and set her feet in the high places of the earth.

"And with these my treasures, I shall make my man a king in truth," she said, slipping along the couch toward him and laying both hands clasped on his arm. She threw back her head, shaking loose her great masses of lustrous hair, and poured her soul at him from half-closed, moist eyes that gleamed like midnight pools in starlight. "Yet must my chosen man assure me of his love for me, and his contempt for my riches. For, though my treasures shall be his, yet will I be first in his heart or forget him."

"And first you are, and shall be, Dolores," whispered Pearse, leaning his chin on her forehead and glaring covetously at the littered wealth of the chests. "What man of warm blood can see any other being or thing when Dolores is by?"

"Then come. I believe thee," she said, rising slowly. "Come with me, my man above price. See here."

She swept back a piece of tapestry at the rear of the chamber, and disclosed a dark and gloomy cavern, hewn out of the solid rock, as was the greater cavern. From a brazier she took a pine splinter, lighted it, and beckoned Pearse into the cave. And as soon as his eyes adjusted themselves to the gloom, he saw the place stowed tightly from floor to ceiling with kegs and half-casks, hooped and marked with black characters.

"Gold?" he gasped, perspiration starting to his brows.

"Gold!" Her rejoinder was tense, almost savage; she glared at him from under the torch, a quivering shape of disgust.

"Why, Dolores, don't look like that," he laughed. "I did but wonder. If this were all gold, it could not enchain your worth in my eyes."

"Then the proof will be easy. This is not gold. It is gunpowder. Our whole store. My rascals are not to be trusted with more powder than they can use at once. From this store I dole them out their rounds; thus are all safe. But at this moment I have other use for this powder. Stay here; or no, help me. It will be finished the sooner."

Dolores ran out into the great chamber again, Pearse following her wonderingly. She left him in wonder but a short time; for, gathering up a great armful of treasure she started back to the cave, crying: "Come, fill thy arms, too." He paused, and she took up his hesitation swiftly, feeling again a surge of doubt and disgust rise in her breast. She called to him, scornfully: "What, art afraid? Come, faint one; beyond here is my secret outlet from this place. Now art satisfied?"

And John Pearse followed into the cave, a-tingle with the hope that he was indeed the elect. He saw her fling her riches down on the tops of the kegs; she bade him do likewise, and then led the way back for more. And so she went, and so he followed; journey after journey was completed, until the gunpowder-kegs were almost buried beneath the wealth of an empire. Then the girl stepped outside, and called Milo. The giant appeared with silent speed.

"Milo, burst me one of these kegs," she

ordered, and her voice forced Pearse's attention; it was so cold, passionless, utterly controlled. The keg was burst, and a trickle of coarse cannon powder ran on the floor.

"Lay a damp train out to the ledge over the grove, Milo!"

Milo disappeared through the gallery, trickling moistened powder from his fingers as he went. Then, when his voice sounded back along the passage, Dolores again took Pearse by the arm and said, looking him full in the eyes: "Thy test, friend. Here am I. Out there is the grove, and beyond it the sea. Take this torch. Put light to the powder train, and thou and I will depart in the white schooner. We shall leave nothing for these vultures to fight over. But together we will go far away into thy world, thee and me."

"And leave my friends here?" he asked, huskily.

"Ay, my man, but not alive!" she whispered, thrusting her dark, flushed face close to his, and letting her lips breathe their fragrance upon him. "They, thy friends, are not as my beasts. They have the brains of the white kings of the earth; they have the cunning which makes of all other races slaves and dependents. Leave them here, living, and in a day they will rule these rabble and together they will hunt us down. Come, haste. Put thy fire to the train."

"Not yet! Tell me what deviltry is to be worked upon my companions."

"Hah! Then thou'rt but lukewarm in thy love. Am I not Dolores? Am I not worth thy two friends? Listen, I'll tell thee my price, friend. If thy friends are to live, then destroy this trash ere we go, so that they get it not. If thy heart is bent upon saving this treasure, then thy hand must first put thy friends into their long sleep. Nay, peace! There is no alternative. The man who mates with me shall be a man indeed; no petty, squeamish lover whose weak heart sickens at removing a rival."

"Give me until morning," he replied, dry of throat, and pallid of face. "It is a terrible thing you ask, Dolores. Yet I dare not say the cost is too high. As for destroying these treasures, that I know is but a trick to try me. You could never go out

into a new world and take a low station. That you would have to do if I set fire to that train." He suddenly darted a look of fierce challenge at her, "There!" he cried. "The trial is yours!"

He flung down his torch, and the powder-train began to splutter and fizz. Dolores flashed a look of approval at him, and burst into a ringing, happy laugh. She kicked aside the torch, and trampled out and relaid the train; then ran to Pearse impulsively, and said with simple earnestness that utterly deceived him:

"Now I believe in thee again, and for ever. 'Twas but to try thee, John. We will leave nothing of worth when we go. But that makes it the more imperative that thy friends have no power to harm us afterward. Think not that Dolores will take a lower station. I shall be queen wherever I go, and my man shall be made a king by my power."

"I give thee until noon to think over thy answer. Go, and the gods protect thee and make thee faithful to me."

Calling Milo back, she bade him conduct Pearse from the great chamber, and as they passed out, little Pascherette peered up at Pearse with an impudent smile, and with her head on one side like a bird she chattered:

"White stranger, thou'rt a fool! What Dolores wills, will surely come to pass. If thy heart fails thee, and thy friends are safe at thy hands, dost think they will have like scruples? Fool again! One of them will kill thee and the other, and that man will gain a peerless mate. And, bend down thy tall head, thou imitation giant—already thy two friends are liberated, each seeking the life of the other, though neither knows of the other's freedom!"

"What?" stammered Pearse, gripping the girl's slim shoulder fiercely. "If you lie—"

"Pshaw! One need not lie to befool thee!" Pascherette retorted scornfully. "Sleep, and if thy throat is not yet slit on thy awakening, make thy decision quickly, and tell it to Dolores."

Pearse would have answered her with more questioning, but she laughed at him, and bade Milo shut him out. So the great

rock fell, and Pearse wandered into the camp, not knowing where he went, and caring little. He had no place to sleep, so far as he knew; yet he felt no wonder. He walked through the sleeping-camp, across the grove, and into the forest, his brain on fire and seething with the problem before him.

"The treasure, with or without 'the woman!" he muttered, clenching his hands savagely. "The treasure! Ye gods! There must be the wealth of *Monte Cristo* there!" He broke off into a harsh laugh at thought of his challenge with the torch. "The witch!" he chuckled. "She was clever, but John Pearse overreached her. Now I know her heart. But—"

He wandered on, and his mind was centered upon Venner and Tomlin. The more he thought over the situation, the more he found his ideas forming themselves after Dolores's.

"Why should I share it?" he asked of the winking stars.

And while he communed with himself regarding her and her demands, Dolores overlooked Milo in a task that brought a sparkle to her eyes and a gleaming smile to her lips. They were repacking the great treasure chests.

CHAPTER XVIII.

PASCHERETTE DEALS AGAIN.

DOLORES spent her night in slumber as peaceful as a babe's. When Milo had completed his task with the treasure chests he went to his own couch. John Pearse wandered deep into the eery forest, his brain filled with tumultuous fancies, while Craik Tomlin and Rupert Venner lay in the dark before the open doors of their separate cells, struggling for a decision with their own good and evil natures. But Dolores, before retiring called Pascherette to dress her hair and gave the little octo-room some secret instructions against the morning.

"Now to thy bed, girl, and wake with bright eyes," said Dolores, her toilet completed. "Let thy busy tongue wag its liveliest then; see to it that the strangers hear

whispers and rumors, yet keep them apart and from harm a while. Thy task with the other rabble is easy. I care not how they are divided. But divided they must be; to the point of mutiny. Go, and sweet dreams to thee."

It was then that a subtle happiness stole into Dolores's face; then her great luminous eyes closed slowly in utter peace; then that she lay down with a gentle sigh on her couch of furs and slept care-free and smiling.

Dreams not of the brightest might have ruffled her calm had she seen the night watch of her maid. For the moment Pascherette was dismissed, and gave a second thought to her orders, a light of dawning hope, prospective triumph, broke over the small, gold-tinted face and sleepiness fled for the night.

"Divided they shall be!" she whispered, and hugged herself rapturously. "Divided to her disaster and—Milo's triumph!"

Then the maid wrapped herself in a robe, and went out to the camp.

Like a phantom she appeared to Venner, and as swiftly vanished; but in the moment that she bent over him she whispered in his ear that Tomlin was the chosen of Dolores; that he and Pearse were doomed at the hands of their friend.

"I tell thee, watch," she said. "By noon to-morrow the truth shall be shown to thee." And in leaving him she placed in his hands the rapier that had been taken from him by Dolores.

To Tomlin next she appeared, and his rapier also she returned; but in his ear was breathed the name of John Pearse. To find Pearse himself was harder; but she waited, and shortly before the dawn he emerged from the forest and walked dully toward his own charred cell.

"Hah, my friend," she said to him, suddenly appearing from the shades. "I fear thy tardiness has defeated thee. Now thou'lt need to look to thyself, for the man Venner has vowed thy life to Dolores, and that of Tomlin."

"What! Venner?"

"Surely. Why not? Is not Dolores worthy such a sacrifice then? Hah, but Venner is a man of decision. Thy eyes saw

the treasure? It's lost to thee—unless—” she whispered, peering up into his angry face.

“Unless?”

“Unless thou prove the better man. Dolores would have thee before all the rest, friend; but she despises a waverer. I tell thee thy fortune is yet in thy hands.”

“How?”

“Here, I have thy sword. Take it, and keep aloof and watch. When thou canst see men carrying the treasure chests out to the white vessel, then will be the time to strike. Join thyself with the men who seem faithful to my mistress. There will be fighting; and the spoils are for the victor.”

Pearse would have stayed her, but she ran from him with a tantalizing laugh and vanished into the women's quarters.

In the morning, when the men had breakfasted, a hum of activity pervaded the place which was attributable to the octoroon's subtle influence. As if by prearrangement, men drew apart into little knots, each gathering about a leader and showing indecision until each man ascertained exactly where his fellows were going. Then Dolores appeared with Milo, and she faced four distinct parties before the great stone.

The sun was metallic in its redness, rising from behind a group of low-hanging, hazy clouds, casting its fierce beams on the point and the low shores of the anchorage. A brazen sky overtopped the scene, giving to green foliage and yellow sands alike, a glare as of terrific artificial light.

As Dolores appeared, the party headed by Caliban stepped forward, muttering angrily, and every man kept hand on knife or cutlass. Caliban himself, nervous and yet determined, glared at the formidable giant and suddenly sprang out alone, shaking his first at Milo, and working himself into greater fury. A frown darkened the face of Dolores; she had commanded Pascherette to bring about a condition of unrest, but nothing like this; for in all four parties was an attitude of suspicion of herself, not of each other. She spoke in a low voice to Milo, then raised her hand and advanced toward Caliban.

“Well, whelp of a deformed dog!” she cried. “What do ye seek with me? Is this the way I've taught thee to beg?”

“I beg nothing!” screamed Caliban, pacing to and fro restlessly. “We demand, not beg!”

“Demand? Have a care for thy loose tongue!”

“My tongue's my own! We are tired of thy trumpety state. Tired of thy mystery and falsity. We know thy plot—know thy cunning scheme to carry thy favorites away from here—to carry away the treasure that is ours, not thine! Think ye we men will let ye go, to set the dogs of war-ships upon us? Here and now we demand a settlement.”

“Demand, again? Good Caliban”—she said softly, and smiled upon him—“thy training has been faulty. Come, I will answer thee.”

“Ye answer us all, or none. I know thee too well to trust thee. Answer these men, who ask thy reason for keeping these three strangers to the detriment of thine own people. Sancho paid dearly for his sight of thy great chamber. Did the stranger who was in there with thee last night suffer, too?”

“That's the talk; answer!” shouted the crew, led by Caliban's band and supported less vociferously by the rest.

“Silence, then; I will answer!” cried Dolores, quivering with suppressed rage. She spoke again to Milo, then turned to face the mob, her head erect, her eyes ablaze.

She flashed a keen glance toward Pearse, who had sidled over to the band led by Stumpy, who seemed less accusative than the others; she nodded faintly, approvingly, and sought the others. Venner stood aloof, on the fringe of Hanglip's crowd; Tomlin stood almost by the side of Spotted Dog.

“I will answer. I see among ye men of troubled minds, who are not yet disposed to flout my authority. Thee, Caliban, I have forgiven before; yet here thou art, venturing again to confront me with demands. I will not reply to thee, nor to any one man or party. To ye all, my people, I have my answer. In one hour, in the grove,

ye shall hear and be satisfied. That is my answer now. Come Milo."

She walked slowly and steadily straight through the midst of the muttering, grumbling mob, Milo at her back like a gargantuan shadow. And looking neither to one way or the other, meeting eyes that glared in her path with cold, dignified disdain, she proceeded through the camp, across the grove, and to the ledge behind the altar. Savage curses followed her; men jostled at her heels and dared Milo to prevent them; the giant, calm and cold as his mistress, moved forward like a human Juggernaut, laying a resistless hand upon a presuming shoulder here, flinging aside a leering ruffian there.

And as the mob thinned, and Dolores entered the cool glade, something in the situation which she had failed to realize before now struck her with force; she started at the thought, then uttered a low, rippling laugh of satisfaction. For Pascherette, in her cunning scheme of double-dealing, had played into her lady's hands to an extent un hoped for by Dolores.

"Milo, the wolves are ready to tear," she said. "And they shall tear—not me, but themselves! Didst note the three strangers? Even they shall help more than I had hoped." She stepped up behind the altar, and as she waited for Milo's assistance in climbing to the secret entrance to the great chamber she asked:

"Thy blow-pipe, hast forgotten its use."

"As soon forget the use of my fingers, Sultana!" replied the giant, permitting a grim smile to wrinkle his face for an instant.

"Then get thy darts. Have thy pipe ready here, thyself concealed, and watch thy time to strike. But first light the altar fires. The rogues believe in my magic no longer; I shall teach them anew, and such magic as shall convince some of them."

From the camp arose a babel of uproar, men shouting against each other, curses and threats alike aimed broadcast. And impatient of the delay, small groups straggled into the grove to wait, Stumpy's party first, their leader striving fiercely to quiet their noise. Dolores reappeared soon, dressed in her altar robe, and her flashing eyes told

her quickly that John Pearse wavered between staying with his chosen party and going in search of his companions. She caught his eye, and smiled brightly at him, beckoning him to her.

He went up to the altar slowly, his face dark and sullen. She waited for him, ignoring the mutterings of the pirates, and as he approached her she gave him her hand.

"My friend, it pleases me to see thee among my faithful ones. Hast made thy decision?"

"Decision! False woman, the decision was made while yet I was with you. The decision was yours, not mine."

"False? Why, good John, what does that mean?" she asked, frank surprise on her face.

"Have you not taken Venner for your man? Is he not your chosen mate, at the price of my life and Tomlin's?"

"Fool!" she cried, fiercely. "Thy dreams have mixed thy brains. What nonsense is this? I told thee thou wert my man, at a price. But thy decision! Time is short. Say quickly what thou wilt do."

"Prove to me that I have heard that which is untrue, and I give you my answer at the hour you demanded it—at noon."

"If thou remain here, the proof shall be shown thee," she replied, dark with passion. Not yet had she quite seen through the cunning of Pascherette. And a growing tumult beyond the trees warned her of greater stress at hand, she had no more time to spare in argument with Pearse. She waved him back, and with fire in her eyes commanded Stumpy to take his men to one side.

"Stand there! Thy rascals will not dare to flout me!"

"We don't want to, lady," growled Stumpy, sullenly. He motioned his men to follow, and took up a position at the right of the altar. But he glared fearlessly at Dolores as he went, and added: "Ye have none more faithful than Stumpy, if thy heart is still with us and for us. But things begin to look plaguey rough, Dolores, since ye spared the white schooner and her owner."

Swiftly Dolores stepped down and glided to Stumpy's side, his men drawing back in-

voluntarily, not in sufficient numbers to be able to cast off their old awe of her.

"Thy ear, good Stumpy," she whispered. "Art for thy fellow pirates, or for me? Speak quickly."

"I'm for you, lady," he replied, shifting awkwardly on his mutilated foot. "For you, but not if what we heard is true."

"I tell thee it was false. Now art for me?" She bent upon him a smile of dazzling beauty, soft-eyed and almost tender, and the pirate's face grew ashamed; he knelt at her feet in humble obeisance, and the girl laid her hand on his head, and bade him rise.

"Then remain faithful, Stumpy, and thou and thy men shall share in my fortunes. Look well to the stranger there. Keep him with thee. I hear the vultures coming."

She returned to the altar, took her place behind the swirling smoke, and stood motionless, awaiting the arrival of the crowd whose noisy progress could be traced step by step. And presently they broke into the grove, unawed and uproarious, Caliban leading. Still the parties kept apart. Hanglip and Spotted Dog ranged themselves on either side of Caliban's gang, and every eye glared redly at the statuesque figure at the altar.

"Answer! Give us yer answer!" cried Caliban.

"Hear, my people!" Dolores cried, raising her arms for silence. "My answer is this. Among ye is a traitor. That traitor has spread lies among ye. Ye are my people, and none other. Did I not save the white ship for ye? What if I preserved her people. They are here, and here they shall remain. Had I thought to desert ye, could I not have gone in the night? Who should say no? Am I not queen of ye all? Then why this childish talk of leaving ye?"

Dolores was carefully fighting for time; she wished to dissect the feeling of the crowd before her, and while she spoke her irrelevant nothings, her keen eyes roved over every face. And Spotted Dog drew and held her gaze as no other did; his face was awork with savage unbelief, his loose lips wreathed and curled in his impatience to speak. At last his fury could not be

longer restrained; he sprang to the front, and howled:

"Lies, all lies! Thy chit of a maid—"

The words were choked in his throat with terrible suddenness. Like something unearthly, reaching from the unknown, the hand of death gripped Spotted Dog and he stumbled and fell forward, gnashing his teeth and clawing futilely at his breast. Dolores did not move. Her expression did not change. Milo had again proved faithful.

But others of Spotted Dog's band, the greatest malcontents, stood forward and peered down at their fallen leader; then with a shout of rage they leaped up, faced the altar, and urged their fellows on.

"More infernal witchcraft!" they cried. "Tear the black witch and her altar down!"

A moment of frightful silence followed, for the speakers felt the same mysterious hand that had reached for and grasped their leader. One by one they dropped in their tracks, smitten none knew how or whence; and even Pearse, with Stumpy's band, shivered at the terrible uncanniness of it. Then Caliban shook off his terror, sensed human agency in the silent death, and looked around for the hand that sped it. As he glared, a dart entered his own breast; but this one, ill-spiced, failed in its mission. The pirate staggered, his eyes widened, then he seized the protruding dart. For an instant he hesitated; then taking the direction indicated by the slanting missile, he flung an arm toward Stumpy's crew and howled:

"There's the dog! There's the sudden death! Tear 'em up, bullies! Pull Stumpy down!"

In an instant the grove seethed with a terrific conflict, in which Stumpy's party was set upon by three times the number. And John Pearse was carried into the thick of the fight; unwilling or not, his skilled rapier began to take toll of the roaring furies about him. And while the battle raged, and Dolores stood calmly looking on, one of the pirates whose duties had kept him at the anchorage of the schooner appeared with a rush upon the scene and shouted:

"Lads, ye're being fooled! The slaves are even now taking the treasure down to the schooner!"

CHAPTER XIX.

WHILE VICTORY HANGS IN THE BALANCE.

THE cry rang through the Grove like a trumpet call, and the fight was stayed instantly. Every eye flashed upon the bringer of the news, and behind him stood Pascherette, partly hidden by the trees, her small, eager face peering from behind a trunk. And as she took in the scene, a great terror stole into her eyes and her lips opened in a gasp.

The octoroon had played her great *coup*. She had carried a lie to the pirate, hoping that his telling of the treasure to his fellows would precipitate such an assault upon Dolores that nothing could survive it. Now she saw the attack already launched without her connivance; she saw the pirate, dead, and saw Stumpy and one of the strangers stoutly defending the queen.

As she stared, at a loss, Caliban staggered out in front again, clutching at his wound, and screamed:

"Satan seize ye if that witch escapes ye now! Tear her down! Tear her down! Then none can keep the treasure from ye."

His last word ended in a sob. From the hidden giant another dart was sped truer, and Caliban pitched headlong on the steps of the altar. And Pascherette, terrified now that they would leave their work incomplete, swarm after the false treasure report, and thus leave her at the mercy of the enraged Dolores, frantically sought for Milo among the press. She knew nothing of his secret duty with the blow-pipe; seeing nothing of him among the defenders, she surmised he was inside on other duty bent. In desperation she placed all upon a single hazard, and, running out into the Grove she screamed:

"The man lies! It is a lie, to make ye forego thy vengeance. There is no treasure taken away. Make thy work complete!"

A medley of conflicting cries arose as the pirates again separated into three parties. Hanglip's crew, with those of the fallen

Caliban, detached themselves from the rest and from two sides threatened the altar, where Dolores stood like a statue, glaring at her maid with deadly fury. Hanglip himself seemed irresolute in the face of the maid's denial; he stood with cutlas raised, not yet sure whether to attack or first see to the treasure story. The decision was made for him; for the pirate bringing the news, seized Pascherette in a fierce grip, and with knife at her breast shouted:

"This little snake told me the loot was going, lads! Get the job over, as I do this!"

Pascherette squirmed in the pirate's grasp, but all her cunning now could not avail her. The knife flashed downward, and she fell to her knees, her tiny golden hands pressed to her side, blood trickling through her fingers. And her face froze in a mask of horror when from behind Dolores stepped Milo, armed with a great broad-ax, and bent his deep black eyes full upon her with terrible accusation in them.

The giant saw the coming storm, and knew the futility of trying to stem it with his blow-pipe. He emerged, armed with his ax, at the moment when the pirates, answering their mate's cry with a shout, surged up the altar steps with blood in their eyes.

Dolores now shook off her seeming unconcern, and with alert vision took in the tremendous crisis. Stumpy's band, with Pearse at their leader's side, had been driven back in the first attack to the rock itself; and now stood with their backs to it grimly waiting for the second onset. They had fought hitherto for her; she saw to it that they did not change their allegiance. Leaping up to the ledge behind the altar, she cried:

"Stumpy! Thou'rt my man. Bring thy fellows up here; one man may hold a score here. Milo! Make way for my faithful ones!"

With Stumpy on the ledge, and his score of men, the battle became dead for the moment. Few of the pirates had firearms, except on forays, and then their ammunition was doled out to them. By this means they had ever been kept in subjection; and now the plan was to prove their undoing;

for they could not reach their prey, whose cutlas points presented an insurmountable barrier to their storming the rock. And with John Pearse up there among the defenders, Tomlin and Venner found themselves wondering just what their own position was. They, unblinded by the rage of the pirates, saw the futility of storming that rocky wall with steel, and in the momentary hush and indecision they withdrew from the mob and stood apart, thinking over what was to come.

To Dolores, the hesitation of her foes was something she could not brook, for her great hope now was to set her rascals at each other's throats to their ultimate annihilation. She whispered into Milo's ear.

"Get thy blow-pipe again. Send a dart into Hanglip's black throat, and let every man see how 'tis done."

The giant obeyed. The slender, six-inch dart sped fair to its mark, and Hanglip dropped. But as he fell his eyes saw, as did his men, whence had come the mysterious death that had already taken heavy toll among them. And Dolores saw her plan work to amazing effect; for Hanglip, with his last wheezing breath, raised himself on his elbow, and barked:

"Now ye see the magic! 'Tis but a man's breath. Up, lads, and take pay for me!"

The assault started in grim, silent fury. In waves the attackers mounted the altar; men gave comrades backs, flung them upward, only to catch them again as they recoiled from the steel of the defense like broken seas at a rock base.

But as the fight advanced, and stricken men were piled high on the great altar, attacking steel reached higher and began to reap results. Stumpy's men, now fully persuaded of their queen's regard for them, fought like paladins, roaring out their rough sea-cries as they cut and stabbed with increasing gusto. Even Pearse fell under the spell of fierce action; his rapier played among the heavier strokes of cutlas and broad-knife like summer lightning. And did a hardy pirate gain the ledge in spite of all, there stood Milo, like a bronze Fate, with deadly ax poised to turn success into death. Yet Stumpy's little band grew less;

and Dolores, standing over all like an Angel of Doom, saw that something must be done speedily unless she was to be left with too great a number of survivors from this lucky conflict.

"Make a swift assault, Stumpy. Milo, swing that great ax of thine for only five minutes," she said. Then when the fight raged higher yet, she drew Pearse by the arm into the secret entrance.

"Here, friend, are muskets and pistols. Load them while I pass them out. We shall see how hungry for our blood these wolves are."

She showed him the store of arms, in a small cave next to the powder store, and musket powder and bullets were also there. As he loaded the weapons, she passed them out in armfuls, then gave Stumpy a flask of powder for priming, and told him to hold out until Milo could bring up other resources as yet unknown.

"And," she said, leading Stumpy inside for a moment, "here you see a powder-train. There, on the floor. Now hear me, my faithful one, should thy foes still beat thee back, bring all thy men along this passage, but before ye come, touch a fire to this train. I shall await thee at the end, Stumpy, and together we shall see these dogs destroyed."

She called Milo, gave him a command, and then took Pearse with her into the great chamber. Here she answered his questioning glance with a soft smile, and seated him in the great chair.

"Thy sword has done nobly, good John," she said, laying her hand on his head. "The peril is over now. Rest. In a little while Milo will have that which will fill these hungry dogs to the gullet. Rest here. I'll soon be with thee." She leaned down, laid her lips lightly on his face, and whispered: "And be of good cheer; the end is in sight for thee and me."

She left him sitting there, wrapped in his confused thoughts. Then she flew to help Milo with his new engine of war which was to decide the day. From a corner of the apartment the giant dragged a brass culverin, mounted on a swivel, stolen from the poop-rail of some tall Indiaman in years gone by. This was charged with powder,

and Milo searched for effective missiles for it. He brought a handful of musket balls to Dolores; she shook her head decidedly after a moment's thought and objected: "Those round pellets are too merciful for such cattle. What do they want? Treasure! Give them treasure, good Milo—their fill of it." As she spoke she ran swiftly into the treasure chamber and seized handfuls of gold chains, while at her command Milo followed her with great gold coins in his huge hands. These they rammed into the cannon, until links of gold fell from the muzzle; then Dolores regarded the terrible thing with a mirthless laugh and bade Milo get to work with it.

"Bid thy men fall back into the gallery as if beaten," she said. "And when the vile bodies of those howling wolves fill the opening, deliver the treasure to them, and may their souls be shattered with their bodies! And that none may remain to repeat this day's mischief, when they break and fly loose, Stumpy and his dogs shall harry them and pursue them into the depths of the forest. Let the maroons finish what we so well begin. See thy gun does not harm the— Wait," she cried, "hold thy artillery until ye see me across the Grove! I shall give thee a sign, then loose thy hell-blast."

Leaving Milo, she ran again through the great chamber and out by the rock door, which was rolled aside and standing open. Then around the mass of the mountain and skirting the grove, past the prostrate Pascherette she sped, casting a glance of bitter hate at the sorely wounded octoroon, but never halting until she reached a point of the underbrush immediately behind the spot where Venner and Tomlin still ranged back and forth uneasily watching the fight.

She rustled the foliage noisily, and the two men swung around in alarm. She thrust her head through the leafy screen, and showed them her face full of tender solicitude. Her great dark eyes were very soft; her scarlet lips were parted in a rosy smile. Venner glared at her, then flashed a glance of reawakening distrust at Tomlin, who returned it tenfold.

"Peace, good friends," she said, softly, laying a finger on her lips and nodding to-

ward the raging battle. "Come with me. Both of ye. The day goes badly with me, and I would undo much that I have done toward ye. Come quickly, and with caution."

A momentary distrust for her made them hesitate; then she whispered intensely: "Haste. This is your opportunity."

Venner first shook off his moodiness and followed her into the brush; and Tomlin was close behind him. When she had them in covert, she stepped out once more, waited to catch Milo's eye at the ledge, then gave him the sign. And the defenders fell back as if suddenly broken and beaten. She waited still, until the attackers swarmed over their own dead, stamping over her altar, and gained the entrance, where they crowded in a milling, roaring mass. Then she glided back to the underbrush and said tersely:

"Come!"

Venner and Tomlin walked on either side of her, not caring to meet each other's eye, for their subjection to Dolores's spell was complete whenever in close proximity to her. Hurriedly she led them around the cliff to the great entrance, beyond which they had never stepped. And they went full of tremendous hopes and suspicions, in which the hope predominated; they failed even to cast a look at their schooner, then lying free at anchor, with a few men visible on her decks. Three of the pirates' long boats lay on the shore abreast of her.

They stood in the entrance to the great chamber, sensing some of the awe that filled the mysterious place, peering into the gloom where the ruby lights now failed to cast their glow in the broader light of day entering the open aperture. Dolores led them in with a gesture and a smile, and they reached the massive plated sliding door and stood beneath the yellow lantern, gazing in speechless wonder at the richness of that barrier. And while they waited, mystified and uneasy, from beyond the mountain came the crash of Milo's gun, and the tremendous discharge reverberated through and through the rock, making the passage where they stood rumble and quake as if the mountain were about to fall.

Their faces went white, and Dolores gave

them a reassuring clasp of the hand while she pressed the side-post of the door and started the pulley and weight mechanism that would give them entry.

"Welcome, friends. Enter," she smiled, standing aside to permit them to pass. And

Rupert Venner and Craik Tomlin, forgetting their gloomy thoughts regarding each other, entered the great chamber, and were brought to a sudden halt at the sight of John Pearse sitting at his ease through the strife in the high chair of state.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the conclusion of this story without waiting a month.



Another Trail

by

Jack Bechdolt

IT was a woman who brought Eric Halverstadt, the watershed patrolman, to an uncertain halt as he crossed the fallen tree which spanned a mountain ravine two hundred feet deep—a frail figure of a woman, but enforced by a businesslike repeater.

For the moment the rifle and the woman behind it was more potent than the law, and the big ranger stood teetering on the log, seeking his balance with hands outspread like a slack wire performer, so abrupt had been his halt.

Beneath his feet was a giddy drop that ended in ugly rocks, but he gave no thought to that—a sure foot on a ticklish log was part of his every-day life.

But the woman who held the end of the bridge, although the object of his official business, was far from being an every-day experience. He was rather uncertain how to take her, though grimly determined to get the job done according to instructions.

"You stop right where you are and listen to me," said the woman with the rifle. She did not really seem more than a girl to Eric Halverstadt.

Her brown hair was drawn back from her brow and fell over her shoulder in a thick rope. Her face and arms were tanned a healthy brown. Her eyes were black and just now as hard as jet and her generous mouth was pressed into a firm line. She wore a man's blue flannel shirt, a short, rough skirt, and high woodsman's boots. And she held the rifle like one who knew how to use it.

"I told you not to come back here," she went on bitterly. "I don't want to see you again—and be careful when you turn around on that log, there's a chipmunk running behind you, don't step on it. You may go now. I guess you know the trail."

"Maybe I do," answered Eric slowly, "but I got my duty to do just the same, Miss Guthrie. I warned you before you

were trespassing on the Clackamas watershed—”

“What do I care for your watershed!” flared the woman.* “I tell you the claim is mine—I paid for it.”

“I know, and I’m mighty sorry you were swindled,” Eric pursued. “But just the same you got to leave. This here’s a water reserve—it’s the supply basin for Clackamas—and it’s against the law—”

“Law,” cried Margaret Guthrie, her lip curling, “a fine law! What good did the law do me when I tried to get it to find the crook that located me here? I’ll be my own law, and I’m going to stay, you hear me?”

“But listen, miss,” Eric pleaded earnestly. “Dr. Brogan, he’s the head of the Clackamas health department and has charge here, he says you got to go—”

“And I say I won’t go.”

“You got to go,” Eric repeated stubbornly. “That’s what he says, and he sent me to give you a final warning before he sends a sheriff—”

“Sheriff! You tell this Dr. Brogan he’d better send a dozen sheriffs and a cannon if he wants to get me out. I paid all my money for this claim, and it’s mine and here I stay. I’m not hurting his watershed.”

“But we can’t let people in the watershed—not even campers, or travelers, or anybody, I tell you. The whole area, eighty-five square miles, every creek that drains here, is in the reserve. You can’t stay!”

Margaret Guthrie laughed sarcastically. “Oh, I can’t! Well, I’m here! As for you, you get out—right now. Turn around!”

The rifle rose slowly. She took deliberate aim at the big ranger.

“But listen,” Eric stammered.

“Turn around, quick! Don’t make me any madder than I am.”

“I warn you I’m an officer of the law—I’m a deputy—”

“You *march!*”

Eric made no mistake in reading the menace of the black eye that glittered over the sights. “Well, don’t say I didn’t warn you!” he shouted angrily and wheeled about on the log.

As he turned a small, brown animal shot between his feet. Startled, his boot descended uncertainly, too far from the center of the curving pathway.

There was a rasp of rotten bark torn from its anchorage, the scuff of his footsteps and he tottered with arms thrashing the empty air.

Almost he regained his balance, lost it and fell. From the rocks below came a crash of breaking branches—then silence. A loose scrap of bark fluttered from the log and plumbed the depths.

The woman—Margaret Guthrie—huddled back against the trail, white with voiceless terror. Her wide black eyes were fixed on the scarred log in a gaze that refused to credit the swift tragedy.

Fighting to master her violent trembling, she crawled slowly to the brink of the ravine and forced herself to look down. The ranger lay about twenty feet below her, on a narrow ledge, dead or unconscious. The inert body, a huddle of clothing, hung precariously on the brink. It seemed as if a breath of wind might dislodge it.

She rose and stood a moment undecided, her eyes turned toward a distant pillar of smoke that stained the hot, fall air. Over there, a mile away, were rangers fighting a blaze in the green timber. She could get help—but it would need at least an hour to bring it.

Instead she ran up the steep trail to the old homesteader’s cabin.

Near the cabin stood a windlass, once used to haul supplies up the hill before a better trail was cut. She stripped this of its aged rope with hands that trembled.

A young fir bowed its trunk in a crook as it rose from the steep, sloping rock at the lip of the ravine. That would offer support for her rope.

She fashioned a running noose in the cable, draped it over the trunk until the noose touched the fallen man and, seizing both strands, went down nimbly, hand over hand.

The ledge was narrow, the footing precarious. She marveled that Eric’s body had found lodging there.

Flattened against the wall she worked rapidly, coaxing the noose under his arm—

pits, lifting his heavy body with a strength more than human.

At least he was alive—she made sure of that. Then she began hauling away across the tree-trunk above. It was no simple task. The man weighed heavily, the bark of the tree was rough and the rope came down to her an inch at a time. Her hands were cut and rasped, but she stuck to it, working hard, fast and with a surprising, efficient coolness.

When the body, dangling like a sack of meal, had risen to the level of the trail she made fast the free end of her rope to a bush and with scarcely a pause for breath climbed back, hand and foot gripped tight against the rough strands.

II.

LAMPLIGHT. Halverstadt blinked painfully as his eyes met the mild glow. He was lying on a bunk against the cabin wall and there was something stuck to his scalp—a bandage.

His eyes searched the tidy little room, the only one in the cabin, seeking further information. Margaret Guthrie stood in the doorway, peering out.

He noticed that the air was acrid with smoke.

He raised himself on one elbow and his bruised arm and shoulder quivered with red-hot pain. He groaned involuntarily and the woman homesteader instantly turned toward him.

"At last!" she remarked. He noticed she seemed greatly relieved.

Despite the pain, Eric wriggled half upright against the pillow. He tested his limbs anxiously.

"All right now?" queried his rescuer. Her tone was brisk and businesslike, but there was no friendliness in her regard.

"I—guess so. Kind of dizzy."

"Here, drink this—you'll feel better."

Eric fingered the bandage on his scalp. "Must have got an awful crack," he murmured. "Lucky I got a thick skull—you know they say you can't kill a square-head."

"I guess that's right," Margaret smiled grimly as she offered the drink.

"That damn—excuse me, miss—that chipmunk kind of took me off my feet—ugh, my head! Say, just what happened?"

Briefly she told him. Eric's eyes glowed.

"You did that," he exclaimed wonderingly, "all alone? You did that for me! Why, that's fine; that's square, mighty square of you. By thunder you got pluck, all right! And I—I thank you, Miss Guthrie, I certainly do!"

Margaret had seated herself. Her face was grim again, the eyes hard. There was no responsive glow to Eric's gratitude.

"It served you right for coming," she remarked coldly, bitterly. "I should have left you there—that's what I should have done."

"But you didn't—"

"No, because I wouldn't let a dog die like that, but maybe you'll learn to leave me alone, now—you and your law!"

Eric managed to sit up, his face dewed with icy perspiration, brought out by pain. "I—can't do that," he answered somberly. "It's what I'm hired for—what I swore to do—it's my job."

"All right—my job's holding this claim then. Don't say I didn't warn you. If you ever come back again—you or anybody else from your department, I'll shoot first and talk about it afterward." Eric noted that the rifle leaned beside her chair.

"Don't do that—for God's sake, Miss Guthrie, listen to reason! You can't win," Eric groaned. His big hands twisted together and his brows knotted as he strove to find words to convince her of her madness.

"It's the law," he argued slowly. "Nobody's bigger than the law. Suppose you shoot me, shoot a dozen deputies, there's more will come—and more until the law's work is done. Do you think, maybe, I enjoy fighting a woman? Do you think I want to make you trouble?"

"But I'm sworn in—I gave my oath to do the law's work, and there's more like me, all that's needed. Nobody can beat that game, I don't care who they are. Full well I know what I owe you this day, but I've got the law's work to do."

"How about me? Is there no law for me?" Margaret Guthrie's eyes blazed.

"You think I'm a criminal, a hardened murderer, because I say this. I tell you I'm only fighting for what is mine. You—you live here in these woods; you like it, don't you? You'd rather live here than anywhere. I know your kind, Eric Halverstadt, you're a woodsman. This is home to you; you are happy here."

Eric nodded slowly.

"Suppose you were like me?" Margaret hurried on. "Suppose the woods had once been your home, years ago, the only place you were ever happy, and suppose you had been taken away, had lived in a city, a dirty, hot, flat, stinking city, where you did hot, tiring, humiliating work among people you despised. Suppose that happened to you as it happened to me?"

"My people belonged to the woods—in Michigan. Generations of them, since the early days when the whole country was wild. Love of the timber was born in me. I can't shake it off. I was only eight when my mother died and my father sold his claim and came to a city with me. He invested what he had in a crooked business, the poor fool. What did he know of cities and business? He lost it all before he died—a common laborer with a broken heart. And I began my fight to get back to the country where I belong—this country. Even then I had the West in mind.

"I worked. I worked in a factory, sewing dresses on dolls when I was a slender kid, getting my schooling at night. And later I worked in a restaurant because there was more money in that—waiting on table. And I studied and I got to be a cashier, and all the time I did what I despised doing because I had this in mind—a piece of land all my own, in the big timber. All that time I dreamed about this: cool woods, big trees, ferns and moss growing underneath, the big hills. And I saved every cent I could get until I got enough.

"Then I saw the advertisement of this land shark, Hilbert, and I paid him my money to locate me on a claim. *This* was my claim! It looked like paradise to me when he brought me here, a cabin already built that I could fix over; a hundred and sixty acres of timber all my own, here in

the mountains. I tell you I was beside myself with joy. I gave him all I saved for it, scared to death he would ask more than I had. Why I was crazy with happiness here—all alone. Most women I used to know would think me mad, but that was all I asked and I got it. I was so happy I hardly slept nights thinking about it—running out to look at it—my own land! Then you came, to tell me I was a trespasser, that the land wasn't mine."

"You think I liked to do that!" Eric rasped bitterly.

"I don't think what you liked—I have enough to think about. I bought this land—bought it in good faith from Hilbert. I gave all I had for it—it's my home—"

"Damn that Hilbert!" Eric cried. "I'll kill him myself, if ever I find the scum!"

"Damn him all you want, you can't find him! Even your precious law couldn't find him for me. He's gone, but I'm left, and I'm going to keep what I bought—in spite of you and all of you!"

"Oh, it doesn't mean much to you. You are safe here in these woods you like. You just go about your duty, patrolling, warning off the trespassers, arresting a poacher now and then—and living down there on the lake in your fine cabin, enjoying a whole kingdom like a monarch. But it means everything to me, this piece here on the mountain. Why, it's only the fringe of your watershed, a little bite out of one corner of it, but it's paradise to me. All my life I fought to get it, and all my life, if I have to, I'll fight to keep it. Don't talk to me of law—it's my happiness, and I'm going to hold it!"

Eric raised a haggard face.

"Don't think I can't understand," he pleaded. "Don't think I don't know how it is with you—that hunger for the woods, for land. I have felt it. I am sorry, sorry for you."

"I don't want your pity!"

"But I must do what I must. I have given you your notice to leave, your final warning. I will go."

He rose painfully from the bunk.

"You'll not go," snapped Margaret. "I've been making up my mind about you, Halverstadt. You stay here."

"Here, you're crazy!"

"We'll see about that." She laid the rifle across her knees. "Sit down," she commanded. He only stared. "I have decided. You stay here. If they want to send more men, let them. I'll keep you, and when they do send others, I'll talk business. Your life against my land—that's my proposition."

"Woman, you're mad—you can't—"

"Sit down!"

"I'll not—I—" Eric gave the lie to his defiance. Face paper-white, he crumpled slowly across the bunk, insensible. Margaret Guthrie lifted him onto the blanket and felt anxiously of his pulse. "That knock on his head pretty nearly did for him," she speculated anxiously.

Long hours passed while Eric lay insensible. Margaret Guthrie, seated by the lamp, the rifle across her knee, watched him and pondered.

Her decision was made—she would fight for what she had. She laid her plans carefully, plans to hold the ranger a hostage. She would defy this law which had done nothing for her. She was doing no actual harm. As she said, the claim was only a technical infringement on the sacred territory of a city's water supply. If they could get her off, the men who enforced the law, well and good—they'd have a fight on their hands!

So she planned and only interrupted her planning for an occasional anxious visit to the door to note the progress of the fire eating through the green timber just beyond her claim.

III.

HALVERSTADT woke choking. The cabin was filled with bitter smoke. Regardless of his maimed muscles he rolled from the bunk.

The lamp was still burning but, outside the open door, dawn showed. Silhouetted against its light stood Margaret Guthrie.

"What is it?" Eric called, pushing her aside. "Great grief, how long's that fire been working this way?"

"All night, most of yesterday afternoon, too," she answered curtly. "It was a mile

or thereabouts away yesterday morning, I was hoping—"

"Time to quit hoping then. Why didn't you rouse me?"

"No need—I got what I want ready to go."

"Well, you'd better have! Look at it, it's worked around into the ravine and it's over the shoulder of the mountain, ringing us in. We'll be lucky if that trail is open."

"Trail? Never mind the trail."

"Never mind—" Eric's mouth hung open as he noted her rifle and savage look.

"We take no trail off this land," she announced calmly. "We're going to stay."

"Stay? We can't stay here."

"I know it. Looks like I'm going to lose a cabin and a lot of my lovely timber, but we won't quit this claim, not while I'm boss. You hear me, Halverstadt? We stay, right here on my land. If the fire takes my house, I can build again; if it takes my timber I'll make out—but you and your law aren't going to take my land away, not if I know it."

"What—what—how d' you mean?"

"Up there in the rocks, a quarter-mile back, is a cave and a good spring. That's where I'm going—and you go where I do."

"Now you're plumb crazy."

"Not so crazy as you'd think. It's been done plenty of times. We can live out any fire running in that cave and what's more, I'm still on my land. I know something about law, Halverstadt, and possession counts for a lot. You can't get me off my claim I tell you, you nor all the fires in the Northwest. That's final, now come on."

The big ranger gaped. A thrill of admiration, admiration for her pluck, swept over him. By all that was holy, this was a woman! He stared at her as at a miracle, his eyes compassing the sturdy little figure in blue flannel and khaki, the braid of hair, suggestive of immaturity, lying in a thick rope over her shoulder, her face flushed with determination, black eyes snapping. Staring, he recognized in her the spirit of the women who had conquered the wilderness—his own kind, women like his mother and the mothers before her, women who knew no defeat while they lived.

But this was no time for admiration.

The fire was not a half-mile away. It was marching against the wind—an uncanny sight—as if endowed with some supernatural power. Towering cedars were lighting like torches. The air hummed with their roar and fierce, eddying back drafts showered them with sparks.

And his duty remained unfinished. His orders were to put the woman off the water reserve, there was nothing else to do—

"Take that bundle—it's grub. We're going now." Margaret shifted the rifle under her arm suggestively.

"No. This—this foolishness has got to stop." Eric spoke slowly as he thought out the situation.

"Halverstadt!" She stepped back a half dozen paces and raised the rifle. He made no move to obey.

He was fired by a tremendous admiration for her, a woman fighting courageously against hopeless odds. He owed her his life and out of gratitude he would gladly spend it in her defense. But his loyalty was already pledged elsewhere, to the law he had sworn to serve.

That she would use the rifle against him, he had little doubt. He had seen enough of her to know her mettle, but his own course was clearly marked. They would have to settle this matter once and for all—and now.

"Give me that gun!" he commanded. "I put you under arrest."

"I warn you for the last time." Her voice was hard. "Take that bundle. I'll give you ten seconds."

"I guess you'd better shoot then." He moved deliberately toward her, his face white, steady gray eyes fixed on her glittering black ones. "I stand no more foolishness. Either you come with me, or—you kill me."

Her lips moved silently, "-Seven, eight, nine." Her finger curled about the trigger and the hammer rose.

Breast to the barrel, the big ranger faced her. "Put your gun down!"

"I—told you—" she panted, "I—" She flung the rifle from her and wheeling threw herself on the ground, sobbing bitterly.

Eric seized her by the shoulder with no gentle grip. At last he was angry, thoroughly angry—a reaction from the strain just snapped. "Get up quick—we're going. You hear me? Get up!"

He raised her none too gently. She stood with face averted, refusing to meet his eye.

"That will end all foolishness between us," he said sternly. "You come with me."

He held her firmly by the arm. At a shambling run they started over the trail that led toward safety and off her claim.

Eric's eyes kept watch before and behind, studying the progress of the blaze with acute anxiety.

The underbrush about them rustled with life—the small wild things of the forest seeking safety ahead of the flames.

There was little enough time. The fire had gone over the shoulder of the mountain and might already be ahead of them. It was close on their heels and it was flanking them along the bottom of the steep ravine.

When they reached a turn of the trail a half-mile from the cabin they would know definitely. The ranger quickened his pace, half dragging his prisoner. Her surrender was complete. She had uttered not a word of protest or hope. She stumbled beside him drearily.

They were at the turn of the trail, a high point that surveyed the slope beyond. Eric stopped with a groan. Already the fire had eaten its way beyond the shoulder of the mountain and barred their path.

IV.

"THERE'S one way left," Eric decided. "Back we go again, to the cabin."

"You mean," she quavered hopefully, "the cave, you'll stay there?"

"I will not. Come on!" Again his arm urged her to a faster pace. He was panting, gasping, choking with the bitter smoke by the time they returned to the cabin.

The fire was close on them, the whole world alight with its horrid glare. Somewhere behind that furnace the splendid morning sun was gilding a world fresh from sleep, but where they stood all earthly light had vanished.

Eric hustled his charge down the trail that led to the lip of the ravine. "There," he jerked, pointing to the single log that spanned it, a narrow bridge now across an inferno of flaming timber. "There's the way we've got to go."

Margaret Guthrie drew back, close against him. "I—I can't do that," she quavered.

"Can't? You got to—no *can't* about it. Here—" he produced a handkerchief—"tie this round your mouth, you can breathe easier."

"But—I can't do it—that log—I have a horror of that log—that high place, and since you fell—Eric, don't make me."

This from the woman who had defied him, threatened his life! Eric looked aghast, bewildered and amazed at the sudden change in her.

Undoubtedly there was a change, a change that dated back but a scant half-hour, from the moment she had thrown the rifle aside. Preoccupied as he had been he had sensed it.

Margaret managed a sorry, one-sided smile of apology. "I am—ashamed," she confessed. "But—I have always feared that place—and now—if I tried to cross it I would fall. I know I would fall!"

"But—good God, we've got to cross it—we aren't going to stay here and die! You must—"

"Yes, I will—I'll try—and I'm sorry to be such a fool. Give me the handkerchief." Above the mask her black eyes met his with a steady, shining courage.

"Bully for you, I knew you'd do it," he encouraged. "Now, put your hands on my shoulders and follow right behind me."

He stepped briskly upon the log. Already the heat from the fire below was scorching it. Curls of smoke rose from under the dry bark. They had no time to spare.

Margaret's hands were placed lightly on his shoulders. He moved outward at a sharp pace.

Beneath his feet the air exploded into a sheet of flame, blinding in its intense glare, scorching his flesh. A vast puff of smoke followed, streaming past him. It stung his nostrils, set his tortured eyes to flooding,

choked his lungs. Doggedly he moved on. The hands on his shoulders fluttered. He heard a muffled cry and their steady pressure, the contact that assured him of Margaret's safety, faltered and vanished.

He wheeled about, the calks of his boots biting savagely in the soft bark of the log.

His hands caught her by the shoulders as she tottered. He swept her close to him. The embrace brought a sharp and nasty reminder of pain from his bruised shoulder, but that he ignored. There was only one course left. His jaw set grimly as he swept her from her feet and lifted her across his shoulder.

"Hang onto—my—neck," he gritted through set teeth. The pain of his effort made him giddy.

Then he whirled and started again at a stumbling run.

Tongues of flame licked up at him. Live coals seared his flesh and fired his clothing.

The thick smoke obscured his way. How far he had traveled he could no longer reckon. Only he knew that soon no human will could withstand the shriek of outraged muscles. He must drop her or fall himself. A few more steps—a half dozen more—one more—two more. Surely this was the end.

His foot slipped. He stumbled and fell, staggering into the blackness that enveloped him, and he became aware that he lay face down in the cool earth of the opposite bank and Margaret Guthrie was trying to rouse him. The air was sweeter there, and as refreshing as a drink of pure water.

The watershed ranger's cabin stood by the great lake, just back of a pretty little beach in a parklike spot. It was built of stripped and finished logs, a glistening palace of the woods. Many a millionaire with a taste for out-of-doors had reason to envy the water-reserve patrolman of Clackamas.

Eric roused from a long, refreshing sleep and freshly clothed and clean at last of the smoke and char, he sought his guest and prisoner.

He moved slowly and stiffly, for overstrained muscles were taking their revenge

on him, but it was not that which made his feet drag and bow his head in shame. He was paying the price for a victory he had never desired and not even the consolation that he had served the law loyally could atone for the misery he had caused.

Margaret Guthrie sat at the end of the little pier where he kept his skiff and where the launch from the head-gates, twelve miles away, landed his supplies. She looked very small and forlorn, leaning against a pile, her eyes turned to the mountains that ringed them in, great forest clad ridges mellowed by the late afternoon sun.

Eric hesitated beside her, miserable. "The fire ran on beyond your place," he managed self-consciously. "But the rangers and a crew from the Weyerhauser camp got it stopped now."

Margaret made no comment. He shifted uneasily.

"The launch will be along in half an hour at most," he began again. "I telephoned for it more than an hour ago. Better get ready."

Still no answer. Her eyes turned to the towering mountain where her home had been, a spot still marked by a cloud of smoke.

He shifted his feet and sighed bitterly. "I know what you think of me," he began miserably, "and I don't blame you, not any at all, but I want to say I didn't do what I did because I wanted to. No, it was something bigger than me, bigger than both of us, Miss Guthrie, that made me do it! And—well, I'm sorry because you've got to leave. I like this place and I can see how you feel about—well, about losing your home. I'm sorry—"

"Sorry," she repeated monotonously, her eyes fixed far across the still lake. "Ah, yes, maybe you are, but you've lost nothing. All this"—the hand in one gesture compassed the kingdom of the reserve—"it's yours, yours to hold. You'll live on here, but I must go—I'm thrown out. I've lost everything. But don't think I'm angry, I know why you did it—and I—I admire you."

She rose slowly and moved closer to him. Her black eyes searched his face courageously. "Is that all you have to say to me, Eric?"

"All I—" He blinked and began to tremble. "Wait," he gasped, "don't go. You may think me crazy—or fresh, but, well this cabin, this place of mine—there's another way out, another trail as I see it. A ranger—well, there's no reason why a ranger can't—get married if—if he could find—Margaret, Margaret Guthrie, could you, do you think—will you try that trail—with me?"

There was a flush in her cheeks, but no sign of confusion in the clear gaze that met his. She watched him kindly.

"It's a lonely life," he pleaded. "Mighty lonely for a single man, but with you—with all the reserve for ours to enjoy—why, you'd win it all back again, your home, everything."

"I don't want it. I don't care about that," she panted. "Eric—I want you. You had me beat. I knew that from the first, from the moment you fell from that log. I fought for the claim because it's in me to fight, but what does the claim matter? It's you I want—where you are is home."



THE BIRD OF FREEDOM

BY MARGARET G. HAYS

HIGH in the bright, blue sky

The eagle screams

Defiance to the foe

Whoe'er it be

Menace to nest, and mate, and Liberty.

White Tigers

by Perley Poore Sheehan.

Author of "The Three Elks," "The Whispering Chorus," "God's Messenger," etc.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SWAMP TERROR.

THERE was nothing in William Yates's religion or philosophy to prevent him from an ardent desire to kill Noah Gregg. The very nature of the case prevented him from sharing this desire with others, but there was nothing sneaking about it. Himself he regarded this desire as the normal thing and perfectly right. Yates was of the fiber that went into the making of the old Vigilantes of the West—the hangers of horse-thieves, the shooters of road-agents. And he regarded Gregg as something worse than any horse-thief or any road-agent.

He had but a slight acquaintance with the man—had seen him about the new army camp once or twice. Yet, even so, he knew that his knowledge of him was unmistakable. He remembered it now. His very first glance at Gregg had brought with it a feeling of hatred and contempt—much the same sort of feeling that might come to a well-bred hound in the presence of any sneaking and pestiferous varmint.

So he looked for Gregg.

He did this patiently and doggedly despite the heavy handicap of time that was upon him. In the first place, he and the other men in the camp were worked pretty close to the limit of human endurance. In the second place, when he was away from the camp by permission, there was always that potent call that he repair immediately to Bayou Pochette, where he knew that Joy—literally and figuratively—awaited

him. Yet, notwithstanding this, he found means to go to most of the places where Noah Gregg might ordinarily have been found, and there to make discreet inquiries as to his whereabouts.

Of course there was always some chance that he would not have to kill Noah. He rather hoped that he would not—on Joy's account. But he did not allow this to lull him into softness.

Perhaps he could so disgrace Noah publicly and chase him out of the neighborhood with such fear in his heart as to render Noah harmless in all the years to come. Such things had been accomplished, according to the unwritten history of that part of the world from which Yates came.

More likely, though, it would be a case of draw, and draw quick, with the best man still on his feet when the smoke cleared away. Then it would be enough in any court to get away clear, especially if it were suspected that Noah had made free with the name of a lady. Yates knew that his own conscience would be clear—not only clear, but jubilant. He knew that he would be abetted by Major Valladon so soon as the major should be privately informed of the nature of the quarrel.

Yates was in deadly earnest. But he was cheerful. None would have suspected this private quest of his. There was, indeed, a good deal about him to suggest the steady cheerfulness of the keen bird-dog, or the joyful wolf-hound when busy in circumstances somewhat similar.

Gregg, however, remained out of sight.

It is to be presumed that this was all in

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the ordinary course of things. Noah was merely back in the swamps intent on capturing that prize alligator. That was all. At least, so Noah told himself.

And yet neither was Noah at peace. There were times when he rode the gale as much as any one, and in his case the gale was a cold and penetrating blast of fear. He attributed this betimes to that fright he had experienced when Yates chased him into the hammock.

"I'll kill that young shote," he whined to himself.

But he never put much heart into it.

He was more preoccupied with his developing conflict with Elizabeth; and, curiously enough, it was out of this that there came that cold, inexplicable breeze of fear.

Jo Curly, consciously or unconsciously nursed this fear along. Jo was superstitious—with all those old superstitions of his black and his red ancestors in the back of his brain, with a trick of cocking his ear at something that the white man could not hear, or squinting off into the darkness at something the white man could not see.

"What do you hear?" Noah would ask.

"I thought I heard a voice."

"You're always hearin' somethin'."

"That may be so, man. They's some mighty funny things a goin' round these swamps at times."

"Voodoo!" sneered Noah.

"This ain't got nothin' to do with voodoo."

But by and by Jo would slightly start again and peer off across the glooming marsh and cypress brakes.

"Well, what do you think you see?"

"Nothin'."

"I s'pose you believe in all this talk about conjure!"

"Man, they's other things in this old swamp than conjure. You don't need conjure to get some of these things started."

"What sort of things?"

"Man, I don't know, but I heerd tell of many a thing this chile ain't got no desire fer to come across."

"What, for example?"

"Devil-fish."

"Devil-fish, they live in salt water. This water here's too brackish for them."

"These devil-fish I'm talkin' about are swamp devil-fish—with a hundred legs and a stinger on every leg. Yes, siree! Every leg just like the tail of a stingaree, only about fifty times more longer—so's they can reach up and ketch birds out of the branches or right on the wing."

"I ain't never run across none," said Noah with pretentious irony.

"They's other things just as bad," said Curly.

"And what this time?"

"Man-eatin' spiders—big as dinner-plates—eyes like a crab's."

"I ain't never seen none!"

But in spite of Noah's cynicism—and his superior bearing toward all superstitions such as a man all white should show in the presence of one of inferior birth—Curly's peculiar beliefs concerning the fauna of the swamps did find a certain lodgment in Noah's spirit, did contribute something to that occasional cold drift of fear that penetrated him through and through.

This was not so bad in the daytime—when the sun rode high, when gusts of torrid perfume made appeal to the tiger within him. The fear was not always there even in the night, for by nature and training Noah was a night-prowler—had acquired most of his wealth and his pleasures at night.

Still the fear came over him every now and then. It came like the breath of a glacier, like a hint of disaster.

In vain he would borrow the exclusive use of the jointly owned power-boat for nocturnal cruises over to Bayou Pochette and back. In vain he would boast afterward to Curly about the progress of his courtship of the elder of the Valladon girls and his purpose to make her his own—all this as a step to becoming the biggest hog-raiser this side of Orleans.

Still the fear would return.

Whether it was because that young bull alligator possessed an inordinate quantity of fat and strength, or whether it was merely because the divine arrangement of the universe required a greater measure of spirit in this particular brute than alligators usually show, the project that was keeping Noah Kregg and Jo Curly out

there in the swamp was proving to be a longer and more tedious affair than either of them had anticipated. The 'gator was still there. They were sure of this. They grunted him to the surface now and then--imitating the plaintive little whine of the female of the species, which no bull knows how to disregard. But a mere glimpse, a muddy whirlpool, and that was all they had of him.

"I feel like givin' him a shot in the snout jes' to get even," Noah wickedly confessed.

But Jo Curly's superior patience, red-man brand, remained unshaken. He had just about formulated in his mind now all the moves he would make once he ever got away with the motor-boat, leaving Noah safely in the lurch. Even Jo had no desire to go through life dogged by a persistence like Noah's. The case of this white woman over at Bayou Pochette was illuminative in this respect. Jo believed that Noah would get the woman, just as he and Noah would eventually get this 'gator; although, for cunning, for secretiveness, for ferocity, for tirelessness, what was a 'gator compared to a woman, and that woman white!

And yet, here was Noah setting a woman-trap.

Jo Curly could sit there and indulge his thoughts of robbing his partner, and even of the advantages and disadvantages of a shot at his partner in the dark, but it was enough to make Jo's blood run cold to think of the desperate chances that Noah was taking in this savage love affair of his. Call it a love affair.

"When are you going to spring your woman-trap?" Jo inquired with stolid humor.

"Pretty damn quick," Noah affirmed. "Pretty damn quick!"

They had talked rather freely about Elizabeth Valladon and what the late Charley Yen had told them about Elizabeth's visit to a certain red hill. As to Charley Yen's demise, and the nature thereof, they had made but passing reference. If Noah Kregg suspected that Charley had been murdered he made no mention of the suspicion. If Jo Curly suspected the truth, he had reason—as well as a natural aptitude—for keeping silent about it.

Jo had a devious mind, and one that was ancient in an ethnogenic sense. Things that were dark as night to a white man's brain could easily have been as clear as day to Jo's inherited vision. Not quite as clear as day, but not altogether opaque, had been that queer and somehow interceptive end of the half-breed, Charley Yen. It looked like a straight-out Chink murder to Jo—just why, he couldn't have told. But there you are. And Jo felt now that Noah was intruding into some vague frontier of magic in the Valladon business.

"They're fixin' to have some swell weddin' over there," Noah ruminated, lighting his pipe from the smoldering camp-fire. He digested the announcement thoroughly before going on with the next. "Mebbe there'll be, at that, another little weddin' they ain't lookin' for."

Jo Curly did not shift his beady, gleaming eyes from the stake fence around the flooded cypress roots just there at the side of the camp. The water gave no hint of its furtive, multiple life.

"I thought I had a gal staked in once," he said, with a brief and wincing smile. He spat between his teeth. "'Twas the other way about." He raised himself cautiously for a better look, resquatted himself. "Don't know what I'd 'a' done—if she didn't go and kill herself—by accident."

The slow waters purred against the stakes.

"Any woman who tries to stake me in," Noah affirmed with abundant leisure, "is likely to have an accident, too."

"'Bout time this ole 'gator's gettin' ready to come out," said Curly, after a long interval.

Noah apparently had not heard him. He sucked at his pipe and seemed to enjoy the slow gurgle of it as he looked at the fitful flame playing about the palmetto stump which fed the fire. But Noah had heard the remark.

"Yes, and 'bout time I'm doin' some-thin' over there in Bayou Pochette."

They did not say good-by to each other. Noah made no further explanation to Curly, nor did Curly appear to expect any further explanation as Noah moved off to—

ward the place where the motor-boat was moored. Curly did not even shift his eyes from the 'gator pen. In this also they were like wild animals. They were stripped as naked of the usual social amenities as a pair of cotton-mouth moccasins.

Noah poled the motor-boat with an oar out into the adjacent "gut," headed her the right way, then sparked his engine and chugged off through the deepening shades of the cypress-swamp. It was coming along toward sunset. It was a time of the day to stir the soul of any man with a grain of poetry in him—purple and deep blue shadows everywhere, with translucent drifts of crimson and gold where the leveling sunshine came through; the birds all singing their last day-songs and zipping and fluttering about in search of quarters for the night; and out of the deeper darknesses coming the first titters and barks, whimpers and calls of the night-prowlers themselves.

But Noah, squatted at the side of his engine, his hand on the tiller-rope, looked neither to the right nor to the left, neither up nor down. Once he did flop his hand against his shoulder with a curse as a mosquito lodged there and began to drill.

The purple had turned to indigo, and the first stars were beginning to shimmer here and there as he came out of a tortuous channel into the familiar expanse of Bayou Pochette.

Yet, dimly, a little more than a mile away across the still water, he could see the faint white shine of the Valladon homestead with its constellation of clearer stars. Even so, Noah whined another oath as one of Fang Shu's shrimping stakes scraped his bulwarks.

"One of these days," said Noah aloud, "I'll clean out that Chink and his stakes!"

The motor-boat *put-putted* forward across deeper water.

Already the sound of it was softly bombarding the farther shore, the one over there where the Valladon house stood. Also the sound circled out in the deepening night and found the retreat where Fang Shu, in his barge of shrimps and dreams, was cooking his evening meal of peppers, rice, and tea.

Fang Shu listened craftily. He was as familiar with the exhaust of that particular engine now as was that certain other to whom the sound of it had come to mean so much.

To Fang Shu the sound grew fainter. To that certain other the sound grew louder.

"He's coming here," said Elizabeth Valladon to herself.

She had been expecting this visit. Joy's wedding-day was less than a week away.

And Elizabeth now, with the eyes of her love and imagination, saw Joy, transfigured, also crowned with orange-blossoms, also at the side of the one youth in the world necessary to make the world young and perfect, but the two of them, not as in that other Eden, standing in the presence of a visible and earthly minister.

She heard the boat draw nearer yet, the ripple of comparative silence as Noah shut off his engine, tillered his craft in toward the landing-place.

"I'll not run away," said Elizabeth. "I can't run away."

She paused, she started forward, she hesitated again, she looked up as if expectant, she hastened to meet the visitor as if he were a lover come to keep a rendezvous.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE TIGER TRAP.

SEATED on the porch of the house were old Major Valladon, Joy, and William Yates. This was the Indian summer of the older fighter's life. Proud! With Bayou Pochette once again the meeting-place of men in uniform, brave men, men who knew horses, men unafraid to die! Why, it was a miracle, something which he could never have foreseen, something brought up magically out of the past, a Lazarus of an event, and made to live again. And the miraculous spring for the fledgling lieutenant, with life one beautiful girl and one great adventure all ahead of him. And, as for Joy, who better than Elizabeth knew what sort of a miracle life had become for her.

A triple miracle, up there on the porch;

a miracle made complete of love and faith; and this was what she had to save.

Something of the love and the faith were hers as she made her roundabout tour through the garden and started for the landing-place by a path through the darkling trees. The others did not see her. Noah Kregg himself did not see her until she stood there almost in the very front of him as he turned from the boat, her approach had been so swift and silent—swift and silent like a ghost; and a good deal like a ghost did she appear to Noah, now, to judge by his reception of her.

It wasn't merely that she was dressed in white, and that the blue darkness reflected from the adjacent water made her appear more pale and diaphanous than she would have appeared in other circumstances. If the truth be told, it probably was no mere physical phenomenon at all that made Elizabeth appear so ghostlike.

The primitive, brute-brain often possesses a sort of second sight—like that power said to be possessed by cats to see things in the astral light. It's a quality, anyway, that is developed at night. And perhaps some hint of this power was possessed by Noah now.

He gave a startled stare.

Elizabeth may have smiled ever so lightly with her lips. But her eyes were the expressive feature. Her eyes glowed, merged with the shadows about them, and seemed supernaturally large.

Noah caught his breath.

"I declare," he said; "you give me quite a turn!"

"Why?"

"Wasn't expectin' to see you so soon," he said, with a tremulous laugh, trying to shake himself free of that first impression. "First off, didn't know whether it was you or Joy."

"Not so loud," urged Elizabeth gently; "they're all up there on the porch. I came hurrying down here as soon as I heard your engine. I've been listening for it all these nights. I'm glad you've come, at last. I wanted to talk to you."

She made no attempt to turn away. Noah himself made no move. He wondered if the woman was trying to trick

him. He cast a quick, almost imperceptible glance to left and right. He listened acutely. He sniffed the air for a taint of tobacco. Who knew but what the woman had a man hidden there in the bushes ready to cut down on him with revolver or shotgun? What was that queer feeling that had swept over him when he looked at her just now?

"So you wanted to talk to me!"

"Yes."

"Didn't appear to be so crazy about it the last time we met."

"I've thought so much—since then."

She paused in her speech. There fell another period of silence, and Kregg utilized this to make certain that there was no one hidden in the bushes, not very close, at any rate; he was too old a hunter to be taken like that, once he had had a chance to sniff around a little; and, anyway, he could keep the woman between him and a possible enemy if there should be such anywhere around. Queer that his misgivings lingered!

"Well, I told you I'd be back, and here I am."

He put out a finger and touched one of her hands. It was a playful gesture, one which should have led Elizabeth to resist. But she did not resist. Her hand was cool and soft. She didn't even flinch. She eyed him eerily.

"I'm through with violence, Noah," she said, divining his surprise and the question it contained. "I believe that you are a man. I'm going to put my faith in your manhood, in the son of your mother."

"Don't you say nothin' about my mother," said Noah, willing to be hostile.

She answered him with a look, let him shake himself down.

"It's a good deal on her account that I've decided to make this appeal to your better nature, Noah. That you are so ready to defend her shows that you have a better nature. I want you to remember that she was once a girl herself, with all a girl's expectations and hopes and happiness in her heart."

This was a hard situation for Noah. He confronted it as was his wont. He pulled out a paper of tobacco. He pulled from

this a generous wad of the coarsely cut leaf and shoved it into his mouth.

"I come here to find out," he said, chewing the leaves into place, "if you're goin' to marry me. Yes, or no?"

"I don't love you enough for that, Noah."

"Oh, you don't!"

Her eyes did not leave his face. She shook her head.

"Mebbe I got somethin' to say about that."

Again she shook her head.

"Suppose I make you marry me!"

"You won't."

"How do you know I won't?"

"By faith!"

Noah laughed. It wasn't a very successful laugh. To cover his confusion he made another pass at her hand. He did not merely seek to touch it this time; he seized it boldly. Thus would he bring their intercourse back to the physical plane and keep it there.

"What sort of a funny tune is that?" asked Noah suddenly, with Elizabeth's hand held tight but unresisting in one of his big fists. He wanted to divert attention. With his other hand he had started to stroke her wrist with an affectation of tenderness. He wondered if she would remain equally impassive if he attempted to kiss her. "Funny, that tune! Sounds like Chink music."

"It is Chinese—a Chinese adaptation."

"A what?"

"That's Joy singing," whispered Elizabeth, with the first quiver of weakness she had shown since Noah's arrival.

"Learn it while you was raisin' her in China?"

"Yes."

"What's she sayin'?"

"There is a land of pure delight—
It's a hymn, Noah."

"Let's go up and set on the porch."

"Noah!"

"What?"

"I don't want you to think that I'm trying to frighten you, but don't you know that they—they would kill you—if they thought—"

"Not if you was my intended, they

wouldn't; an' if they tried it, by thunder, I'd show 'em who they was tryin' to fool with. You ought to know that. One of your champeen pistol-toters tried it once."

"Noah, we'll not talk of that. Listen to me a moment. It's for your own good, Noah. You don't know how I have thought. You don't know how I have—yes, I'll say it—how I've *prayed*, Noah. I've prayed for myself, and I've-prayed for that sweet and lovely young girl up there—listen to her voice—a voice like a mocking-bird's—and for you, Noah! I've prayed for you. There, let go of my hand."

"Not by a dern sight!"

"Noah, you must listen to me. I tell you, I've seen my way clear. I tell you that the Lord will not permit you to go on as you intend to go. Not against me. I know, I tell you! I know! I know! It was to tell you that I wanted to see you; that I wasn't afraid to see you. I tell you that Joy will be protected in the Lord's own way. If I have to drown myself that will be the solution, and I'll accept it as quickly and gratefully as any other."

"You! Why you wouldn't dare to drown yourself!"

"Wouldn't dare! I'm that child's mother, Noah. Do you know what that means? Her mother! Mother! Mother! Do you suppose that tiger, or snake, or hell itself could harm her if by simply drowning I could keep that harm away from her? Do you? Do you? Have you so completely forgotten your own mother? Wasn't that why I mentioned her just now? Noah! Noah! Are you a fool as well as a—as a—beast?"

"Har, now," Noah broke in; "I'm goin' to make you pay for that. You got to pay me with a good kiss."

He began to fold her to him with a progressive movement, like that of a python, or of some less supple brute. Elizabeth briefly struggled. She was still rebellious, tense, as she ceased to struggle.

"If I kiss you," she whispered, "will you go away—and promise not to come back—until after the wedding?"

"I don't promise nothin'. I don't have to."

"Promise!" breathed Elizabeth, white. "Promise! Or God will punish you. He's told me that He would."

There was a mere concentration of conflicting shapes, one of them white and one of them black, and an adhesive violence that may have lasted for the length of two stifled heart-beats, then Elizabeth was free and Noah had recoiled — laughing, fumbling to wipe his mouth with the back of his hand.

"Bess! Oh, Bess!"

This was Joy, calling to her from the house, merrily, but insistently, and Elizabeth sped away into the enveloping shadows and was gone. She was gone, but she had left those last words of hers to quiver in the stillness after her.

Noah still heard them. They spread through the night around him like the ripples of a lake where a fish has jumped.

He disregarded them. He concentrated his interest on the burning intoxication of that moment that he had held her in his arms, his lips to her lowered head. Well, he had had this much, and this hadn't been the last of it. There was occasion to exult in retrospect. There was occasion to gloat in prospect. He had her staked in, all right. And she was giving in. Just like a 'gator, she was beginning to weaken. How much less were her struggles now to what they had been.

"And I ain't made no promises, neither," he chuckled to himself.

But the very fact that he made such a declaration, even to himself, gave him a slight turn, started him to perceiving again the shake and ripple of those last words she had spoken. It was as though he had made some plea or concession to conscience.

He stored fresh tobacco into his mouth. That always solaced him to some extent, and he tried to imagine that the effect was there now, as he cast off, poled his boat toward open water, then started up his engine. But a beetle whanged against his face, and his heart jumped like his crazy motor.

"I thought she mought 'a' had some one layin' in the bushes," he explained to himself, lamely and foolishly. "You can't

never tell what they're up to. But I got her! I got her!"

All the time he was trying to keep his mind on the physical woman he had left back there on the bank. He was not without a certain amount of imagination, a certain gift for reverie. She had been so white and soft. She had shed a perfume about her like a white oleander, very delicate and very clean.

But this very whiteness and softness, this very delicacy and perfume, which he so certainly remembered, only served to bring back some element of unreality, of ghostliness. She was so unlike any woman he had ever come in contact with, and he fell to wondering.

He shook himself out of this wondering to regale and fortify himself with the old familiar theme that possession of Elizabeth meant hogs. He would have hogs and hogs, more of them almost than he could count. The woods and the swamps around Bayou Pochette would swarm with them. They would root up the mud on the shore at low tide, where the fiddlers now ran to waste by the million; root up the succulent wild tubers of the marsh; grow fat and sweet on persimmons, acorns, muscadine grapes, and Cherokee plums now going to waste in the hammock.

"Cloudin' up," said Noah aloud.

Not even on hogs would his mind stay put. He had cast up his face. There was one tiny, twinkling blue star up there. It took a last look at Noah, and Noah took a last look at it, and then the star was gone. There were none others visible.

But Noah did not mind the dark. Blindfolded he could have crossed the wide expanse of the lagoon and found that particular channel through the swamp back to the place where he and Jo Curly had established their camp. He carried no lights. No one did. He liked the dark.

Yet, why did Noah suddenly shut off his engine, and stifle his breath to listen? Had he heard something? Or had he merely imagined it? That was one trouble with a gas-engine; it kicked up such a fuss you couldn't hear yourself think. He thought that he had heard a voice—close to him—familiar.

"Must 'a' been dreamin'!"

He stood up for a better look around him. He slowly scratched himself. Far, far back in the direction from which he had come he could see the lights of the Valladon windows.

Then, deft and sudden, the voice was making itself heard again, and he was recognizing it for what it was. It was an echo in his own brain. That was all it was. It was an echo of those last words Elizabeth had said to him—before she fled—fled like a ghost.

Noah turned. He sat down. He cast one look in the direction of the near and glowering and dimly discernible sky-line, automatically, to make sure of his position and direction.

He turned the engine over, seized the tiller-rope. The boat once more climbed for the dark ahead.

But scarcely had it gone a length before another voice came chattering in on Noah. It was a fearful voice. It let out a mixed scream and curse, then came to an abrupt and gibbering stop, and this voice was real, as Noah well knew, for the voice was his own. Right out of the dark something had clawed into him and stung him in a dozen places—face, shoulders, breast, arms—stuck to him, supple and remorseless, as he tried to fight himself free.

The very boat seemed to be panic-stricken, as if in the stinging tangle of a devil-fish; for, with the power still on, it swerved around, madly, and Noah was twisted in other tangles that clawed and coiled.

"Help!" he gasped.

This was the sort of devil-fish that Jo Curly had spoken about—fringed around with a hundred lashes—each lash like the tail of a stingaree, only infinitely longer, finer, more capable of inflicting pain. In the flashing terror, Noah could see the brute—or thought he could.

The black water was churning up its phosphorescence. His boat was milling. It was all he could do to keep from going overboard into the greater horror that lurked down there.

But Noah saw, or thought he saw, the whips that spun about him, tore at him,

fastened their burning ends into his flesh. He was even aware of his own incoherence—as he called for help, and as he yelled for the thing—whatever it was—to stop, to let him go—all the time that he was trying to tear himself free and to get an oar or anything else that would serve as a weapon. He was not without courage of a certain kind, and now he was the wild animal trapped and wounded. But his very incoherence frightened him as much as anything—as if it were the human element in him that was strangled and overwhelmed.

Not a devil-fish, but spiders! That was it!

Jo Curly had said that there were man-eating spiders in the swamp—and the negroes knew—the Indians knew!

He fought, but his pain and his entanglement—mental as well as physical—grew worse, swiftly worse, the thing that had caught him going progressively savage as he himself went savage. It was cunning. There was no way to meet its attack. It was as if he were blind and the enemy had a million eyes—eyes like a crab's—eyes that could see in the water and the dark.

He was being fought to a standstill.

But again he called on his brain.

This was a nightmare in which he was tangled, and yet a nightmare that was real. The impossible had happened to him. The impossible had come into existence, and he was the first victim of it. With every living creature of the surrounding lagoons and swamps he had been familiar ever since he could remember. The information was flashing back upon him, stark and lurid. He had seen big spiders, and brushed through strong spider-webs, in his time. But nothing like this.

He batted left and right, received fresh stings. His struggles served him in one respect at least. He had managed to kick out the battery-wire, and the engine had stopped. The boat rocked and came round.

"Help!"

Help was close.

Out of the dark with wabbly speed came another boat, Fang Shu's.

Noah recognized it, and straightway he

managed to resume a measure of control over himself. Straightway something of his nightmare began to slough away.

"What's the matter?" the Chinaman's voice.

Noah began to whimper and snarl an explanation made up chiefly of curses—the slightly hysterical curses and ugly shreds of laughter let out by a man who has been both frightened and hurt.

Fang Shu made a détour and came up alongside. Of shrimp and incense were the smells of his craft. The smell of shrimp was familiar to Noah. The smell of incense was exotic. It was a combination of the real and the unreal which still had its other vestiges in his brain.

"I got tangled up in somethin'," said Noah.

And he cut himself off with that short intake of his breath which was characteristic of his moments of excitement. It flashed into his brain that this was the old Chinaman's doings, and the flash was followed by a glint of rage, of swiftly purposed vengeance.

But he badly needed the Chinaman's help at this present moment. The terror was still upon him—terror and helplessness and an almost killing pain; for, at every move he made, his skin was transpierced again by the enemy, and the enemy's fine-spun meshes wound him up tighter and tighter.

He could have wept—murder in his heart, murder assaulting him in a hundred places.

Fang Shu came aboard.

"You hold still," the Chinaman commanded.

CHAPTER XXV.

SPIDER-WISDOM.

FANG SHU was shriveled and old. To judge by his looks he had no more strength than any other shriveled ancient. But there was something spidery about him. For Fang Shu had a gift for speed and accuracy, was clever with his claws—that is to say, his hands. Moreover, there may have been some truth in

that tale of Jo Curly's about there being man-eating spiders in the swamp. To old traditions like that there generally is some basis of fact. In any case, spiderlike was Fang Shu as he stepped toward Noah, lightly and nimbly, in those Chinese shoes of his.

And in Fang Shu's hands was a bit of prepared web—he carried that treasured crimson-silk cord he had kept by him for so many years. He had approached Noah from the rear. A swift movement, unerring, and the cord was looped around Noah's neck.

"Har!" gulped Noah.

But that was about all, except for a clicking gasp as the cord tightened and shut off his wind.

Noah made a few wild, spasmodic efforts to free himself; but the invisible enemy who had already assailed him, stung him, wound him up in sticky pain, was as implacable as ever—was more implacable than ever, interfering with Noah's arms and legs, and even the free movement of his head.

But his head came back—face up, mouth open, eyes staring.

Across the wide darkness of the lagoon fled Noah's sight, and also his dimming consciousness, to where the lights of the Valladon home shone dimly amidst the flooding darkness of the night. Those lights meant Elizabeth for him, just as the roaring cadence in his ears—which was timed accurately to the pulsing of his blood—became a voice somewhat like Elizabeth's, only vaster, storming those last words of hers at him now:

"Promise! Or God will punish you. He's told me that He would!"

But Fang Shu was spiderlike in yet another respect. There was spider-wisdom in that old brain of his. How often had he studied the habits of spiders—all sorts of spiders—during those long years of lonely observation he had lived here in Bayou Pochette! Spiders could overcome enemies more powerful and poisonous than they by swiftness and strategy. Yet no spider killed until that was absolutely necessary.

And this was in Fang Shu's thought now.

He had drawn the silk cord about Noah's

neck, and he pulled and pulled on it so long as Noah continued to struggle; yet not once did Fang Shu pull too hard, nor too brutally. Then, as soon as Noah relaxed, so did Fang Shu—just as a spider draws back and takes note in its winning fight against a scorpion.

"He lives," said Fang Shu, aloud to his own spirit.

After that the old Chinaman appeared to be spinning a web around Noah—around and around—a web that was fine and silken.

All this was happening out there on the surface of the dark lagoon—which seemed so peaceful and yet which was the scene of so many other similar tragedies invented by Nature: where secretive alligators were stalking dormant fish, where snakes silently answered the vanities of vociferous frogs, where phosphorescent jelly-fish encompassed and destroyed the millions of tiny miracles of a lesser life.

When the man-spider who was Fang Shu had the unconscious Noah safely webbed up in his thousand strands, Fang Shu also turned his eyes in the direction of those lights on the other side of the lagoon. After a manner, he addressed himself to Elizabeth.

He did not call her white tiger. He called her "Sister of the Righteous-Harmony-Fist."

"I do this for you," he said.

He took his time about his thought. There was no particular occasion for hurry. He recalled something from Kong-fu-tse (by Westerners called Confucius):

"Heart-reciprocity!"

It was the Chinese Golden Rule.

Noah opened his eyes, but he did not stir. He could not stir, and he knew that he could not. He was helpless—as helpless as a blue-bottle fly in a web. He was lying on his back. Apart from a bitten tongue and various smarts about his face and body he was in no great pain. But the bed he lay on was evidently a plank and not very comfortable. The room he was in had an exceedingly low and concave roof of poles and matting.

Then from the crowding concepts of his

returning consciousness he disentangled the remembered smell of shrimp and incense.

This roused him to a wider observation which, none the less, was cautious. His caution never slumbered long. It was an element of that savage quality of his brain.

It was still night. Through the open end of the cabin he could see the late-rising, misshapen moon, through a cloud-rift, just over the low blackness of the distant horizon, and this told him without conscious process of thought that it was coming along toward midnight. It was early when he left the Valladon place. That must have been three or four hours ago.

What had happened to him?

He slightly turned his head. His eyes met Fang Shu's with a distinct shock.

Just back of Fang Shu there was a very small lamp with a naked flame, and the light of this was so small and tremulous that he had not immediately noticed it. The lamp stood on a low shelf. There were flowers on the shelf, and a cluster of smoking joss-sticks, and a sort of small cupboard with red calico curtains. All this Noah saw, but merely as what a painter would have called "atmosphere" to the presence of Fang Shu himself.

Fang Shu was contemplating Noah—had been contemplating him all along, to judge by his attitude and expression. The Chinaman's wizen old face bore the stamp of thought, of weariness and worry.

All around was the noisy silence of the swamp and woods at night—the cadenced, tiny shrill of the billion small voices of insects and small frogs, the faint and very distant howling of a hound, then the soft and warbling hoot of an owl. But the silence was tremendous just the same, as the darkness of the night was great, notwithstanding the presence of the wan and misshapen moon.

Noah put two and two together, so to speak. He made deductions. He was aboard Fang Shu's house-boat. This must be the Chinaman's way of healing him of such injuries as he may have received a while before. But Noah did not want to be healed like this.

"Har!" he exclaimed.

His throat hurt him. The hurt awak-

ened some dim recollection of his last moments before losing consciousness.

Fang Shu gave a start. It was evident that for all his contemplation of Noah his own thoughts had been far away and occupied, with other things. Now his old eyes glinted. His face took on a brighter look. He leaned forward.

"You feel all right?" he queried.

"Untie me."

"You feel strong?"

"Har, now! Untie me, I tell you."

"You remember Yet Ghee?"

"Who's Yet Ghee?"

"Him who die—him you call Charley Yen."

Just this much, and the tremendous silence—with its foam of sound—was in upon them again like an ocean.

It was evident that Fang Shu was in no hurry even now. He turned away. He gave no heed whatsoever to that single spasmodic effort Noah made to free himself. Instead, Fang Shu was busy about a small package under the shelf where his joss was located. When he turned again to where Noah lay, the Chinaman had a sheet of cheap note-paper in his hands, a bottle of ink, and a new penholder.

At this great crisis in his life, Noah was strangely alert for little things.

He noticed that the note-paper was ruled and shiny, and that in one corner of it there was a small nosegay printed in bright colors. He had once written a love-letter on a sheet of note-paper like that. The penholder and its nib were of the kind that children buy for a penny at the beginning of the school-term. Noah had once bought a penholder like that.

"What are you up to?" Noah demanded.

His curiosity was making him forget momentarily that sinister reference to Charley Yen.

But Fang Shu did not immediately answer. He brought out a small new bottle of ink and pulled the cork of this. The ink spilled a little about the opening of the bottle, and Fang Shu wiped this clean with a bit of rag. Then when Fang Shu did speak again, it was to ask a question of his own:

"You know how to write?"

It was in Noah's mind to answer that he did not know how to write, but Noah's vanity was aroused. Not for nothing had he spent all those laborious tongue-chewing, toe-twisting hours in the schoolhouse of his youth. Not everybody knew how to write. But he did.

"What if I do?" he responded.

"You know how to write?"

"What do you take me for? An ignorant Chink?"

"You know how to write?"

"Sure I do!"

"You write letter," said Fang Shu, content.

Noah swallowed.

"Who to?"

Fang Shu, instead of answering immediately, searched for and found a small square of white plank, which was evidently a part of his kitchen outfit. He disposed this and the other things on his knees as he seated himself on a box at Noah's side.

"You write," he said, "a good-by letter to Miss Valladon."

"The hell I will."

"You remember Yet Ghee?"

Fang Shu took out a bright-bladed knife, and Noah held his breath against the expected pain; but the Chinaman merely cut certain strings, and Noah discovered that his right forearm was free.

"What's Charley Yen got to do with it?" Noah asked.

"Bad man. He died."

Again that silence. Noah permitted himself another look at the moon. The position of it told him where he was. The Valladons were a mile away, Jo Curly considerably further. There was no one else hereabout except himself and his Chink captor.

"I don't mind writin' for yuh," said Noah. "What do yuh want me to write?"

"I tell you."

Fang Shu put down his writing things. He had discovered that Noah was inconveniently placed to write. He was not rough as he helped his prisoner into a more comfortable posture. The Chinaman resumed his place. He prepared the pen and put it into the other's hand. He began to dictate.

"You say," he intoned, "how you are bad man and you know it."

There was a spurt of venom in Noah's heart, but the pen scratched. He had already addressed his missive to Elizabeth Valladon.

"What next?" he grated.

"You say," Fang Shu resumed, "how you go away."

"What's the good of sayin' that when I ain't goin' away?"

"You say," Fang Shu dictated, without heat, "you go to land where no one comes back—where she never hear from you any more—where you never bother her again." Fang Shu was digging into his knowledge of Western poetry. "'There—is a land—of pure delight'—put that in."

Noah stopped writing. He began to snarl.

"First, you got to tell me what you're up to. They'll string yuh to a tree—that's what they'll do—burn yuh alive! Chink doin' this to a white man!"

"White tiger!" Fang Shu said softly.

But at Noah's first sign of rage he had been careful to remove the sheet thus far written safe out of harm's way.

"You write?" he asked.

"No!"

Noah was tearing at the cords that bound him with his one free hand. But he could make no progress. The cords were like those that had netted him out there on the surface of the bayou—the very finest, thinnest fish-line that could be procured and yet with strength enough in it to hold a leaping tarpon. Finally, Noah subsided.

"You write?"

"No, dang yuh!"

Noah felt one of his shoes pulled from his feet, then a sock. The cool air struck his foot. Then he was transpierced by a delicate agony as something sharp yet light, like a toothpick, began to scrape back and forth along the sole of his foot from heel to toe.

"Hold on," Noah panted. "I'll write."

The misshapen moon climbed higher, but most of the time it was behind the drift of ragged clouds. One would have said that the moon was timid and discreet, yet overcome by an overwhelming curiosity

which made it take a look now and then, in spite of itself, at what was transpiring below—down there on the dark shore of Bayou Pochette—in the cabin of Fang Shu's house-boat—with the pale cypress-trees standing sentinel near.

"If I write this," said Noah, still with a note of challenge in his tones, "will you turn me loose?"

Fang Shu meditated, met Noah's eyes.

"I turn you loose."

"And let me get away from here?"

"Yes. You get away from here. Write!"

Every now and then Fang Shu turned the letter around so that he himself could read it. This is what he read:

DEER MISS VALLADON

I am a bad man and I no it, but now I go away so as not to wurry you no more. You no the old song there is a land of pure delite. I won't never come back no more and you won't never heer from me no more, as I have got a change of hart. I kild Mr. Colton anyways, so I guess I better lite out. May God bless you for ever more amen.

All the time that Fang Shu was reading this just preliminary to Noah's signing it, Noah was casting eyes that craved and glittered this way and that in quest of the first weapon he could seize so soon as Fang Shu should cast him loose. He fixed his choice on the mallet Fang Shu used in driving his shrimping-stakes. The mallet was close to hand, lissom yet heavy, almost close enough for Noah to get his hand on it now.

But so soon as Noah had signed the missive Fang Shu lit an oddly shaped Chinese pipe and proceeded to blow clouds of smoke into Noah's face—did this gently and persistently, as a nurse might have carried out some unheard of plan to lull a baby to sleep.

And presently Noah slept. Whereupon Fang Shu did what else he had to do.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WITHOUT RANCOR.

SQUATTED on the outer end of his boat, Fang Shu looked over at the moon and let his thoughts run free. His thoughts were of heaven and of earth, and

of the eternal mysteries of earthly and spiritual human existence.

Said he:

"Yea; this act of mine this night may set me back a thousand *li* on the Way. Who knows, except thou, O my Master! Perhaps, in my next incarnation I shall be nothing but a white tiger myself." He flared with a white flame of inspiration. "But it was worth it!"

He let himself drift up, as if he himself had become nothing but a kite. He quoted the words of the poet concerning Han Yu:

"He rode on the dragon to the white cloud domain

He grasped with his hand the glory of the sky;

Robed with the effulgence of the stars,

The wind bore him deliberately to the throne of God."

Fang came back from this loftiness and listened with his ear bent to the boat-cabin back of him. No sound came from it. The enemy of the Fist of Righteous Harmony had ended his days of this incarnation in a swift opium dream—of opium and something else. Opium insured the dream so long as life lasted. The something else insured that other, longer dream that even a white tiger may know after death.

Presently Fang Shu arose and went into the cabin. He felt no fear. He felt nothing at all but a philosophic calm.

He had put a perfumed silk handkerchief over the dead man's face. He did not look at the victim, but his thoughts were of him. Even his thoughts were not of that part of his victim who lay there now on the long and narrow box which had become his death-bed and was to become his bed otherwise for days and nights to come.

For Fang Shu was without rancor.

The old Chinaman pulled back to left and right the little red calico curtains of his shrine. With his own writing implements he rapidly painted himself a prayer on a piece of red paper. The prayer, inadequately translated, ran as follows:

GUARDIAN OF HEAVEN:

I, Fang Shu, send you this tiger-soul with respectful recommendation to your august clemency. He was ferocious; he is tamed. He sinned; he atoned. If he return to you less

chaste than when he left your house before, charge this not against him; nor against your obedient servant,

FANG SHU.

There was a flicker of flame in the brass bowl as the prayer went up in fragrant smoke.

Fang Shu, nevertheless, considered what else he had to do. It was evident to him that the dead white tiger had infinitely greater need of that pine box on which he lay than did Fang Shu himself. So the old Chinaman went about his dispositions. He had various bits of old iron and lead about the boat which he did not need.

The waning moon was mounting higher yet, but the dawn was in the air as Fang Shu sculled slowly out over the misty surface of the bayou toward what he knew to be its deepest part. The mist was like smoke from a thousand altar-fires. It rose up and curtained him from the eyes of the world. The moon was the only witness as he thrust the long box overboard.

It gave Fang Shu's heart a little twinge.

How often had he figured himself—or that which was earthly of him—riding back in this self-same box to the land of his heart's desire; that—

land of pure delight,
Where saints immortal reign.

He intoned this hymn in his spirit as he had so often heard the daughter of Elizabeth Valladon sing it. And now that Elizabeth Valladon herself was saved from the claws of this white tiger who was gone, would she begin to sing again as she had sung in the old, old days?

The dawn came up, the drifting mist of it turning to all the shades between purple and pink.

Presently the sun appeared, and it was day.

A couple of miles away from Bayou Pochette, there where he and his partner had set their alligator-trap and pitched their camp, Jo Curly crawled out of the small shelter of palmetto-leaves where he had finally gone to sleep when weary with waiting for Kregg's return. Curly looked about him over the face of the warm and smiling earth.

His first impulse was to rage. The 'gator fence was broken. While he slept, and while Noah Kregg was recreant to the partnership, the young bull had come out and struggled his way to freedom. But Curly checked his rage.

Where was Noah, anyway?

There went through his animal and institutional brain and instinctive guess at disaster. Noah had gone out on a dangerous chase. Noah had not returned.

"The 'gator knowed," whispered Curly.

Like most of his kind, he attributed all sorts of occult powers to other creatures than man.

He went over to the bank and stepped into the light bateau that was tethered there. With no thought of breakfast, he started to row off rapidly in the direction where it was most likely some trace of Noah and the missing power-boat would be found. He found the power-boat, but there was no one in it. The boat had drifted out of the lagoon into the narrow, twisting "gut" that Noah would have followed on his way back to camp. The boat had drifted in among some cypress knees. Nothing was the matter with it.

But here and there—very faint, very small, imperceptible to most eyes not of Indian or African descent—were a few tiny flecks of blood.

Curly pushed on, in his small bateau, cautiously, to the edge of the lagoon and looked out over the calm surface of it. He drew back. He held himself steady and hidden under a screen of overhanging sea-laurel.

There, not very far away, he saw Fang Shu in that ancient boat of his placidly taking down some sort of fishing-tackle from his shrimping-stakes. It was such fishing-tackle as not even Curly, in all his wide experience of such things, had ever seen—a spider-web of fine and almost invisible cords suspended well above the water and yet threaded through many powerful hooks.

Curly smiled—a saturnine smile.

As silent as an alligator could have gone he made his way back to the deserted motor-boat, climbed into it, hitched the painter of the bateau to it for a tow-line.

His boat, now! What if Noah had been merely frightened or hurt? What if he

should turn up again? It wouldn't be before he, Jo Curly, was safe away to that lost river he knew about over in the wilds of Arkansas.

And so Jo Curly, and the last remaining trace of Noah Kregg, except one, go gliding out of this simple history of human events.

There was that one remaining trace of Noah Kregg's earthly activity, and Fang Shu thought about it constantly, and with high hopes, as he went about the work of unstringing this tiger-trap of his invention from his shrimping-stakes.

Many a man of genius along other lines, many a captain of industry will take the utmost delight in some slight literary feat.

So with Fang Shu.

With a sort of holy gratitude was he thinking of that farewell message he had dictated and caused Noah Kregg much against his will to sign.

Fang Shu was in no hurry. Never in his life had he been in less of a hurry. From a distance he followed the arrangements for the wedding-day at the old white house over there on the bluff. By signs which he could read as well as any man he knew what day this would be, the importance of it as a social event to the surrounding country and, particularly, of that vast new army camp to the South.

Not until the afternoon before the wedding-day did he bestir himself to complete his part in the closing cycle of events.

He poled his old boat that afternoon up the dark and hidden waterway that led to his garden. The garden was at the height of its magnificence, especially with regard to the flowers with which he had garnished it. The gardenia-bush was a mass of waxen-white bloom of an overpowering fragrance. The crape-myrtle trees were drifts of pink. The overblooming oleanders and Rambler-roses flamed against the dark-green shadows that hemmed them in. There were mauve hibiscus flowers and yellow lilies, wild heliotrope and flowering Spanish bayonet.

Of all these elements Fang Shu composed a mighty bouquet. It was so large that it would have made a good load for any man, and the perfume of it was so powerful that it spread about it a species of intoxication.

The old Chinaman bound the bouquet up

carefully in sprays of cedar with strips of bark.

He did all this solemnly and reverently, like a worker in a temple. He could understand the sentiment of that Chinese princess who gave burial in her garden to such flowers as had fallen:

Flowers fade and fly, and flying fill the sky;
Their bloom departs, their perfume gone,
Yet who stands pitying by?

Late that evening such guests as were assembled already in the old house at Bayou Pochette sang and chatted on the porch. Elizabeth was there. She sat slightly apart. She was in that peculiar state of mind that may come to one who hopes and hopes and yet has no foundation for hope.

The old hound, Bolivar, came creeping up apologetically to where she sat and thrust his muzzle into her hand. She caressed him. But she was suddenly aware that not even this attention on her part was sufficient to hold Bolivar where he was. Bolivar had suddenly withdrawn, his head was indicating an eager interest in something off in the direction of the lagoon.

"Noah Kregg!"

Could it be he? Had he waited thus until the last moment and then come after all?

Elizabeth's heart stood still. Then she was chiding herself for a lack of faith. Surely the hound had discovered nothing unfriendly in the deepening shadows over there.

Bolivar gave a whimper of pleasure, twisted to his feet. Elizabeth herself arose and followed him. On the rim of the bluff stood Fang Shu weighted down with that flower-offering of his.

"Fang Shu!" Elizabeth pronounced his name.

The old Chinaman bowed a trifle lower.

"It is to wish you happiness," he said.

Young William Yates and his bride-to-be had followed Elizabeth unperceived. They expressed themselves with hearty delight, and Joy shook hands with the old fisherman—Chinese style—shaking hands with herself instead of with him—and she spoke to him in the Mandarin dialect, compliments that were as monumental and ancient as the

great Chinese Wall. He replied in kind, smiling with shrewd dignity. He bowed himself away.

But Elizabeth, unnoticed of the others, had received an envelope from Fang Shu, and instantly guessed that this must have been the real reason for his coming.

By accident or design, it was this envelope that Fang Shu had thrust at her before the others came, and she had seen the sign painted on it. It was the sign of that jade amulet she still wore about her neck in some faint but fading faith that it would bring her good luck at last. It was the sign of the Fist of Righteous Harmony.

When she could, she stole off by herself to read the note that the envelope contained.

It was that farewell message from Noah Kregg, wherein Noah informed her that he had undergone a change of heart, that he was going to reform, that he was going off to a far, far country where he expected to get a fresh start, and whence he would never return, and whence would never come any word or sign of him whatsoever to disturb either Joy's tranquillity or her own.

What had happened? What had worked the change? Was it the prayers which she herself had offered up? Or was it some esoteric power exerted by that old, forgotten, all-but-invisible but ever-present Chinese friend of hers? She had heard much about the mysterious and even magical powers of the Boxers while she was in China. Was it something like this? Or was it, after all, but the working-out of a Providence which was good?

She didn't know. But that night she prayed for Fang Shu; and, yes, she prayed for him of the changed heart, Noah Kregg.

And as she prayed she saw that that early vision of hers was right. So winds ever upward, in the ascending spiral, the path that must be followed by every soul. One cycle of her way was all but ended.

It was as if in celebration of this cycle-end, that Joy was brilliantly married to her lieutenant-hero on the following day, and that the guests dined and danced far into the night—to the music of such an old plantation-band as the old-timers thereabouts had not heard since that other war—and the

lights of two or three hundred paper lanterns shimmered out over the dark lagoon—there where Fang Shu drifted in his temple-home, and listened, and thought the thoughts of long-dead Chinese poets.

Late that night, very late, when the old house was still at last and all the lanterns and other lights were out, Elizabeth knelt at the window of her bedroom—that window which had been the magic casement of her girlhood. Now, almost as then, there was a happiness and a gratitude and a wonder in the face that she lifted to the night.

This was the end of one cycle, the beginning of a new. On the morrow, Guy La Salle was going to arrive. She knew what

he would have to say to her. She knew what her answer would be. Together they had been tried. The way lay broad ahead of them, sweeping grandly upward—ever upward. Why should they not travel it together from now on?

"O God," thrilled Elizabeth, "I thank Thee! I thank Thee!"

That was all, but the surge of tenderness and gratitude held as she stopped to listen. From the broad expanse of dark-blue silver where the lagoon lay like an enchanted lake there came to her again, softly, mysteriously, stirring old memories and dreams, those three quavering, minor notes of an invisible musician.

(The end.)

Hat 41,580

by

Eugene P. Lyle, Jr.

"IF a man calculates to hit a body on the nose or purse, then to my notion that's the place where you want to hit him back!" a brisk and bashful hatter once explained.

Now the word *bashful*, as applied to this hatter, is a derivative of the superactive verb *to bash*. Good nature was his temperament and his estate. He was a live-wire; but one humming cheerily. Friendly was his alert black eyes, and friendly the mouth under his close-cropped black mustache. He was crisp, clean, and quick; neat as a new jack-knife. His smile was tonic; his "Good morning" a bracer to the sluggard. Buying a hat of him was like buying a mint-julep. It made a person feel better.

His remark as quoted above embodied his code—the code of the come-back. Instead of "Welcome" across his parquetry threshold for patrons to read coming in, there was "Come back, colonel," which they read going out. "Every customer a come-back" was his watchword for victory and the goal of his vigilance. He brought them back, too.

For example, his hat, the I. Dast hat, was guaranteed Frayless and Fadeless for a season of six months; otherwise you could come back and get your money back. Rarely, as it happened, was that pretext used, but with the beginning of a new season the temptation to buck the breezily confident Mr. Dast on his guarantee for a second

throw was usually compelling. Buying an I. Dast hat was like playing a game.

Then there was something else much more insidious. The time guarantee meant that there must be a record of the date of purchase, and Mr. Dast had a machine built which registered this date by perforations in the sweatband of the hat. Suppose a man bought himself a hat on St. Patrick's day in the by-gone year when Missouri went Republican, then the numerals would be 3-17-08. The last stood for the year, it being assumed that there would be no confusion as to the century. But wait! There was still another numeral, quite a healthy numeral, and this was the serial number of that hat, for the machine was also a numbering machine, honest and incorruptible, and the serial number was registered with the same operation that recorded the date.

Not only was the purchaser comfortably assured by this number that he would go his way under a numerously and highly approved lid, but there were possibilities of an even more interesting nature. Equipped with pencil and paper and a knowledge of long and short division, he worked them out, usually, for himself. If he could divide the serial number of the hat by its price and come out even, he received a coupon entitling him to his next hat free of charge, with the compliments of the house. Or, if he could evenly divide the serial number by the size of the hat (in case of a fractional size, throw off the fraction), and by each number of the date, then the house presented him with that hat and a ten-dollar gold-piece from the cash drawer to boot.

And yet, what's a game without a jackpot? Did the brisk and bashful hatter think of that? You know he did. Listen! If you could evenly divide your serial number by all the numbers—by the size, the day, the month, the year (not the century), and the price—what did you get? Well, you got Mr. Dast's check for one thousand dollars.

The price, however, was \$2.97. Always, year in and year out, exactly \$2.97! To the popular mind \$2.97 became a symbol for the excellent hat that you could buy with it. It was a reasonable price, but a very

unreasonable number if you tried to divide it into a serial number and make the thing come out even. You could not do it more than once in 297 times. And even when you did, then probably the size wouldn't come through, or the month, or the day, or the year. One or the other was almost sure to drag a hank of remainder, like your tattered hopes, along with it.

But we all know how it is. A capital prize is hard to get, or it wouldn't be a capital prize, but it has one devilish fascination, which is that almost every man thinks *he* is the one who *can* get it. Furthermore, just as with any game from horse racing to roulette, there were the technical gamblers who thought they could beat this one. All they needed was a certain mystic stuff known as the right dope. It seemed worth while. A thousand iron boys for two ninety-seven—and you got the hat, no matter what—was a long shot but a tempting one. They kept coming back.

Mr. I. Dast—and the I. was for Ichabod, bestowed by a Connecticut mother—knew they would. He knew more than hats. He had a canny preconception of these thousand-dollar emotions, of the mental processes started and of the resultant impulses, invigorating commerce, manifold profits.

Consider, as Ichabod did, almost any customer happening in. Take this Snappy Dresser who happens in on the first bright day in April of the year 1914 to give up a critical survey of the nobby new spring blocks. His mind is entirely on his hat, but after he has bought it, paid for it, and received it into his hands from the numbering machine, watch him drape himself over the plate glass of the nearest show-case and try to divide his serial number by 297 (the price) and then by 14 (the year.) As the number is 38,815, he naturally fails both times. Perceiving that he has drawn an absolute blank he grins, puts on the hat, lights a cigarette, blackguards Ichabod a moment for an unrepentant burglar, and departs. "Come back, colonel," he reads as he passes out, and although it is a busy day, Ichabod smiles after him the half-conscious smile of a Yankee uncle. For Ichabod knows as well as he knows his rent-day that the Snappy Dresser will be in again

before the week is out to buy another hat. Yet why this prescience? Because the Snappy Dresser is not wearing away merely a hat, but under the hat the double-yolk nest egg of dope and hope, otherwise that unremunerative serial number, 38,815, awaiting incubation. The S. D. will stay home that night and figure multiples from it. They all do. With his mind's eye Ichabod sees him. The S. D. will figure the next and next higher multiple of 297, trying always for one likewise divisible by 14, the year. And thus he will come to the big multiple, and he will think he is the only one who has been quite this foxy. They all do. The first big multiple after 38,815 is 41,580.

With so many chances for and so few against, hat 41,580 cannot very well miss being bought when it will be a capital prize hat, so all the S. D. has to do is stick around and be the one to buy it. And the delightful part is that the S. D. believes himself the only fox on the trail, everybody else being mutts. Just here Ichabod laughed out loud.

It was the 6th of April when the Snappy Dresser bought hat 38,815, and though nearly three thousand hats were yet to go before No. 41,580 came out, nevertheless the S. D. casually strolled into the store the very next day. Ichabod was not disappointed. It was even a busier day than the day before, and to watch the dawning of suspicion and anxiety upon the S. D.'s countenance was a treat of itself. You would have supposed the S. D. had staked a rich prospect and the score or more of variegated gentlemen buying hats were claim-jumpers. Also, you should have seen him trying to steal a glimpse—oh, so casually—at the number in a hat when one was purchased, and the jealous scowl of the purchaser as the latter foiled him. Nor would Ichabod at the numbering machine give him the slightest tip, jocularly ignoring all conversational hints. After a while the S. D. went out, profoundly thoughtful.

But he came back the next day. Ichabod had laid off his three extra clerks this day, and Ichabod as usual proved a good guesser, for the store was almost deserted. The snappy dresser looked much relieved at this,

and then he looked puzzled, and finally more worried than ever. Ichabod laughed internally, knowing what was passing in the S. D.'s mind. For the S. D. was remembering that this was the eighth, and that 8 cannot be divided into 51,580. Consequently only chance customers were buying hats on the eighth, and by the same token those yesterday weren't chance customers at all. No, they were dopesters on the trail, every one a secret, sly Reynard like himself.

The next day, the ninth, being a divisible day, trade was brisk again, increasingly so, and increased by the Snappy Dresser. He could stand it no longer.

"D' you know," he said to Mr. Dast, "friend o' mine at the boarding-house fell so hard for this bonnet I promised to come in 'n' see if I couldn't get its mate."

"Fine! Thank you, too!" said Ichabod heartily, with never a smile. Funny how they made excuses that way, as if a hatter had to be careful not to sell more hats to a man than he needed!

"You don't say—39,916 already!" the S. D. ejaculated in a hoarse whisper when he saw the number in the sweatband of his second new hat. That evening he happened in and bought a third—40,811. Not a thousand to go yet! Ere another sun sank beneath the rim of this troubled world somebody was going to be a thousand dollars better off for having bought himself a new hat!

By eleven o'clock next morning I. Dast's hat store looked like a run on the bank. They were standing in line—standing in five lines, each meandering to a clerk stationed before one of the glass and golden oak show-cases.

"Seven 'n' a quarter. Brown. That 'n'," says a customer, pointing at a hat as if it were a cabbage.

Then, with his purchase in a big printed paper sack, he goes to the end of a sixth queue, which brings him to the cashier's desk, where he pays for it, and to the numbering machine alongside, where I. Dast himself punches it for him with the date and number. The customer looks at the number, and looks for a fleeting moment as if he had just lost a thousand dollars. But he drops the hat back into the sack, so that

no one else can see, and turns away, lips and fingers working out some mental calculation. The chances are that he falls into line again. There were customers with two or three, or even four or five, of the bulging paper sacks clutched by the upper edges in their fingers, and an expression of strain and dogged resolve in their eyes.

It was the big scene of Ichabod's little comedy, this violent flurry in headgear and human nature, and one that always interested him keenly, quite apart from the stream of profit flowing into his till. But then, just as things were working swiftly to the dénouement and a quick curtain, the cashier stepped from behind his desk and handed Ichabod a twenty-dollar bill.

"Bad one," he whispered. "Got it only a minute ago, but before I noticed it in the rush you'd numbered the fellow's hat and he was gone."

"Uhuh!" said Ichabod absently. His attention was all for the drama being milled out by the numbering machine of fate, of which he, I. Dast, was the presiding *deus ex machinâ*. "Here you are, sir," he said, passing the latest numbered hat to the waiting customer. The customer proved to be the Snappy Dresser, and Ichabod watched his face as he looked at the number. The number was 41,583!

The cream of the show, for Ichabod, was when a man looked at his number to discover that the winning number had already passed. The play of expression was then most racy of human nature. You could see the soul react as plain as the flop of a fish in an aquarium. But at heart Ichabod was sorry that every number could not be the winning number. Poor Snappy Dresser!

"You ought to remember the guy," the cashier was persisting. "One awful hick. Never take him for a shover. Nice looking country girl with him."

Ichabod was suddenly interested. "Sure, I remember!" he exclaimed, snatching up his hat. "He was the one who— Here, hold the fort, Boyd. Bet you a bean I shove that shover!"

Through the crush of I. Dast fans still passionately and innocently buying hats, Ichabod made his way to the door and looked up and down the crowded street.

The nice-looking country girl—indeed Ichabod did remember her—would be a restful sight and not easily mistaken 'mid the smart plumage of the flocks of shoppers. He would know her again at once. Back there in the store, busy as he was, he had liked to look at her. Looking at her, he had seemed to hear again the whispering of a breeze in ripening corn. He had been able to gather something of their situation, too, for the clerk nearest the numbering machine had waited on them.

"She thinks I ain't citified enough," her companion had run on to the clerk. "You do, too, Connie. You went and said as much when I met you down to the dee-pot this mornin'. And now I'm goin' to show her—yes, sir—show her a plenty that she ain't havin' to marry no dag-gone hayfoot!" She tugged angrily at his sleeve, but he smirked and hee-hawed, pawing the while over I. Dast's most daring alpines. "First off a cha-poo," he cackles, "then a necktie and a new soot, and so on with all the fixin's, one after t'other; and then me and Connie, we'll hunt up a preacher and head out for the honeymoonin'."

But the girl was not this sort at all. "Hush, Alvin!" she said furiously. "And, besides, you're taking too much for granted. I never promised. Didn't I make that very plain? I—I just came to—make sure."

The rebuked swain hee-hawed again, nudging the clerk. "My, but ain't she t'arin' mad! See her kick in the dashboard, and all because I went and give her away! Say, mister, ain't you got any with pink and orange-colored ribbon? I sort o' figger they'd look real stylish."

It had made Ichabod sick. A sweet, wholesome girl like that! She looked sensible, too. His heart had gone out to her. Patience and a habit of resignation that softened her features told him, too, that it was no pettish rebellion and longing for the foolish things of life which had brought her to the city. This little girl had her heart set on the real things. And at that Ichabod had looked at her companion—at that boob! Poor, poor little girl!

"Ought to make any prince proud meeting her at a dee-pot!" Ichabod had grumbled.

And now, peering up and down the street, she was the one his eyes sought first, though the awful hick would have been the likelier landmark, standing out like a ruin on the city's fashionable retail thoroughfare. Through an opening in the crowd he identified them easily, five doors down, gazing at the display in a haberdasher's window.

"Taking it cool, isn't he?" said Dast to himself. "After that simple-minded honey-moon chatter, calculates nobody would ever spot him for a breaker, even when the bill is discovered!"

Yet as he drew nearer and saw the country visitors more closely, he wondered if there might not be some mistake. They looked real, absolutely. Despite an indefinable furtiveness beneath the man's boorish swagger, he looked too much the young gawk to have just passed a counterfeit bill purposely and now be so unconscious of it. Or if one could still be dubious, a glance at the girl with him must have stifled any lingering suspicion. She was all that was reminiscent of an old farmhouse in the shade, of butter chilled down at the spring, of cream with the peaches. Her large, soft brown eyes were wide with wondering interest; and they were brave, honest, straightforward eyes. What a contrast she was to the preening, high-skirted, web-footed flappers of this town's Broadway! Her shoes were plain little black ones, painstakingly polished. A stain of clay on one of them, left perhaps by a dab of mud when she had climbed into the family buggy that morning to be driven to the station, inexplicably endeared itself to I. Dast. And her little tailor-made suit of dark blue had no doubt come by money-order; and her hat, too, with its roses. But what of that? Their charm was undeniable, and Ichabod would as soon have thought of criticising a wood violet with the dew still on it. Christmas, he'd almost forgotten Reuben and the phony twenty!

But he promptly came to, for they were turning into the haberdasher's. "Meaning to buy a tie and pass some more of the stuff!" he thought, though without conviction, as he reached them at the door.

"One moment, Mr. Gosh-all Hemlock," he said, taking the countryman by the lapel

of his coat. "I've got a little bill of yours here that is really very bad. Now wait," he added when the fellow bridled quite according to expectations, "you can have all the trouble you want about this. Depends on you."

The rustic's long jaw hung loose and his big noisy mouth hung open. "Why, dag-gone it, mister!" he was beginning when Dast took another tack, mostly because of the questioning bewilderment in the girl's brown eyes.

"We will go back to my office," he said shortly, trying to hold his captive's eyes, which slipped and dodged from control. "We'll dig it all out there. That is unless you want a policeman."

The man assented with a yokel's meek eagerness. Dast felt as if he had picked on somebody under his size. He could scarcely believe that they grew 'em that green.

This one was plumb obsolete. He gaped stiff-necked, and his knee-action was string-halted. His clothes were creased and wrinkled from having lain closely packed. They were snuff-colored with a purple stripe, the coat very long with slashed pockets and scalloped flaps, the trousers wide and baggy—all the rococo elegance of a forgotten decade. And—here Ichabod shivered violently—on his wedge-shaped head he wore his new I. Dast hat, which was a fuzzy lemon Alpine with an orange band of watered silk. His old hat he carried in an I. Dast paper bag. Ichabod wondered more and more at the girl. This wasn't her class at all. Well, anyway, she wasn't the least bit happy. The flush of embarrassment in her cheek and the nervous biting of her lip showed him that. If she had not been sure when she came to meet her swain, she certainly ought to be now.

He did not take them through the store, but through the hall at the side, past the elevators of the building, to a door opening into his office. The office was back of the store; it was a corner of the shipping-room partitioned off in more glass and golden oak. Very gentle in manner and even repentant, Ichabod pushed forward the chair beside his desk for the girl. When she was seated he turned to her companion. He held the counterfeit between the man's shifting eyes.

"What would you do," he asked, "if somebody robbed you of twenty dollars?"

"Me?" said the man, looking past Ichabod's head, first on one side and then on the other. "Me—why, dag-gone my skin, I'd get it back, and more too, if I c'd ketch the feller!"

Dast nodded curt approval. "Sit down there." He nodded at a stenographer's chair, and went to the door opening into the shipping-room. "Hey, Jim," he called; "chase up front and ask Mr. Boyd to step here." Then, when the cashier appeared, "Boyd," he asked, "ever see this man before? Did, eh? Well, what about him?"

"When he paid for his hat not half an hour ago," said Boyd, "he handed me a fifty."

"What's that? A fifty!"

"Oh, the fifty was all right, Mr. Dast. A limp and old one, like it had come from grandfather's wallet, but good as gold."

The accused nodded truculently. Better not nobody say that fifty warn't all right!

"With his change," the cashier continued, "I gave him two twenties. He took them with the smaller bills and began counting and fumbling them. Then, like he'd just happened to remember, he handed me back a twenty and asked for fives and ones. On account of the rush I wanted to clear him away from there, so I changed the twenty for him, and didn't notice it was a different one—a dirty counterfeit—until I turned to put it in the drawer."

"Counterfeit?" The man caught at the word. "Why, say, mister, this feller ain't nothin' but a ornery, low-lived—"

"Oh, shut up!" said Dast. "You know, Boyd," he went on, "that he's going to say that he handed you back one of the twenties that you handed him?"

"And he can put it to music, too," Boyd retorted, "but those two twenties I pulled out of a packet from the bank. The band was still around them."

"Which settles that—your word against his. All right, Boyd. That's all—"

"Excuse me, please!" Christmas, it was the girl putting in! Her troubled glance was fluttering from one to another. "But there needn't be a question of anybody's word. Alvin—" Her gaze went to her

companion, and when he scowled at her, Dast was positive that the look in her eyes steadied to a contemptuous scorn very satisfying to behold. "Alvin has no idea of saying," she went on, now very quietly, "that the gentleman did not take the two twenty-dollar bills from a package of bills with a paper band around them. We both saw him, and I remember very clearly that he did."

The atmosphere was a bit electric when she finished, and then Boyd burst forth with sudden vigor:

"Whew, the girl's all right!"

"And whoever said she wasn't?" demanded Ichabod, flushing up. "But that 'll be all, Boyd. Thank you!"

He closed the door on Boyd, and again confronted the countryman. "You did shove this twenty on me, didn't you?"

The stupor and fright on the long face were convincing. Why, mister, he didn't know till this very minute that it warn't genu-wine money. Some low-flung scalawag must have passed it on him. Yes, sir, that was the way 'twas. It did look bad for him, he knowed that, but, listen here, now! He had all his money in his hand, like this—here the girl confirmed his statement—and he reckoned he just accidentally got the bills mixed.

Ichabod tugged thoughtfully at his mustache. After all, it might have been like that.

"And yet I don't seem to hear anything about making good," he mused aloud. "I'm still this twenty to the bad, if you'll notice."

"Huh, if that's what's bitin' on you!" said the countryman, reaching into his pocket, "I ain't askin' nothin' better than to buy that there bill back."

The hatter put up his hand. "No, keep your money. But I'm going to do this. I'm going to take back that hat." With which he did in fact remove the festive Alpine from the wedge-shaped head. "We'll consider there's been no sale. Correct?"

The wedge-shaped head nodded greedily. Saving twenty dollars for the price of a hat was a right smart bargain.

Ichabod's procedure now became mysterious. The man watched him with mouth open, the girl with increasing interest.

Using his desk shears, he clipped out a section of the sweatband of the new hat, about five inches long. Next, leaning over his desk, he took out a blank envelope, thought for a moment, then suddenly smiled all over, and addressed the envelope to the Treasurer of the Children's Fresh Air Fund. His face was still aglow with happy inspiration as he hustled over to a steel safe in one corner, opened it, opened an inner drawer, and returned to the desk with a slip of paper that looked like a bank-check all filled out and signed. This he folded with the strip of sweatband, and enclosed both in the addressed envelope. Leaving the envelope unsealed on his desk, evidently to await the writing of a letter that would go with it before it was mailed, he picked up the hat again.

"Here—make you a present of what's left of it," and he tossed the hat back to the countryman. Then it was his turn to be puzzled.

A queer change had come over the erstwhile yokel. The clownish stare had narrowed to a wizen crafty suspicion. The man's teeth were milling together, his long chin and parted lips working to the same movement. The little eyes were hot, angry, vindictive, darting like a ferret's. He took the hat only to glance at the mutilation of the sweatband. Instantly his gaze leaped to the unsealed envelope on the desk. Baffled curiosity, although it was more than curiosity, carried him farther. He rose stealthily to his feet, sidled nearer, and reached swiftly for the envelope. Ichabod blocked him, interposing an arm across his chest, at which the fellow lost the last vanishing shred of control. His words hissed like an adder.

"Say, cull, I don't make you at all. I'm a new guy to this burg. Here to meet the kid and I ain't hep. Now you tell me what you want with that piece o' leather out o' my hat?"

Here was incongruity. The girl was startled, too, as Ichabod bore in mind. Little sisters to the cows and chickens, she stared at the Alvin person as though she had never seen him before. Certainly she had never heard that lingo, or the tone that went with it, before. Gradually a slight

smile, though not exactly a pleasant one, grew upon Ichabod's face.

"A new guy; eh? New York?"

The one-time countryman did not try to cover his tracks. He chose to brazen it through. "Where'd you suppose?" he sneered. "From a village like this? Oh, Gawd!"

Dast turned to the girl. "You tell me," he said gently.

She did not hesitate. The large brown eyes had been studying Mr. Dast very particularly when he was not noticing, and it was not glibness, but a surge of relief, as if she had discerned an unexpected friend in trouble, that accounted for her frankness.

"He is Alvin Rackley," she said, "and I am Constance Lathrop. We both come from near here—over in Calhoun County, Clearwater Post-Office. But Alvin didn't take to farming, and he left about five years ago. He wanted to better himself, he said, and even his father declared there was plenty of room for it, and some said even worse—that he was trifling and sneaking. It was right hard standing up for him at times. We—he and I—well, we'd always played together as children, you see, and when he began writing how easy it was to—'cop the dough,' he called it—in New York, I was right glad to think he was making something of himself. But I wasn't thinking of him in any other way until just lately when he wrote and wanted me to come to New York and—marry him. I couldn't do that because—because I wasn't at all sure. Then he asked me to meet him here—for a few hours of sightseeing—and as he couldn't come out to the farm, having so little time from his business, I thought it was only fair to him, and maybe to me, too, and as to-day was a Saturday and no school—"

"One moment," Dast interrupted. "You teach school then?"

"Oh, it's only our little country school."

"But they pay you?" Her head went up in surprise. "I mean," he added, "have you saved much? Don't think I'm fresh, please! There's something I want to find out—quick!"

"For the love o' soup, Connie, shut him up!" snarled Alvin Rackley. "Tell the coot it's none of his rotten business."

But the girl was not thinking Ichabod fresh. She seemed to know where he was leading.

"You wish to know if I let Alvin have any of my savings?" she said. "Yes, I did; three hundred dollars. He asked me to bring it, for an investment he knew of. That fifty-dollar bill was mine."

Ichabod's exuberant good nature had slowly departed. "And it was a good bill," he thought, looking at her, "and the dirty crook was using you both for a blind. But wait a minute. "One more question, Miss Constance. This morning, when you met your old neighbor after five years, what did you think? Was there anything that—jarred you?"

Her eyes widened in greater astonishment. "Why," she faltered, "I was—I was surprised, of course."

"Yes. In what way?"

"Because—well, for one thing I could not understand why, after his being in New York for five years, he should be wearing the very clothes that he went away in."

Ichabod whistled softly. "Good!" he said. "And no wonder they bothered you. No, I don't mean about their being horrid, either. But maybe Alvin can explain. And be quick about it, too, Alvin!" he added in a very different tone. "After you'd got to New York and got going good—good and crooked, copping the dough—what made you save the hick duds? Don't want to answer; eh? Well, here's my little guess. You saved them because they were so gosh awful. They'd come in handy in one game or another. Decoy for the come-ons, for instance. Breaking bad bills into good little ones, for another. Then that honeymoon stuff? Pretty nifty! Had to have a real country girl to help throw off suspicion while you go round changing good fifties and then bad twenties. So you send for one who trusted you, and you—you—" Ichabod gulped. He was rapidly becoming rather a mad hatter. "See here, you; Johnny the Rat, or whatever they call you in New York, you'd marry her, or maybe not; but you'd take her with you."

He could not go on, not in words. The close-up of the infamy, confessed as plain as sin in the viperish little eyes, proved

overwhelming. But the time for words had passed in any case, for the man whipped an automatic pistol from his inside coat pocket, though for an instant the yellow in him palsied his nerve. But he pressed the trigger, and Ichabod dipped under the stream of bullets, to come up with one arm limp and the other describing a mighty arch that stopped at the point of the gunman's chin.

Clerks from the store, followed soon by a policeman, crowded in. Ichabod was kneeling on the office rug beside the man's prostrate form, and with his one good hand he was turning out the man's pockets.

"Not so green as he looks," said Ichabod, gray of face, glancing up at the officer. "Plenty of greengoods, though—in this pile here. This other is real money. But three hundred of it belongs to—this lady. Now take him along. Out this door, through the hall."

The officer jerked the dazed and spurious countryman to his feet, who resisted and began yelping protest, glaring always at Ichabod.

"Wait—cain't you—wait? This guy pulled something. He cut a piece out o' my hat and put it with a check in an envelope. I tell you he pulled somethin', and I got to know."

"Sure, Alvin, I don't mind," said Ichabod, smiling a pale smile. "One good shove deserves another. To steal a twenty you lose—lose a thousand. Being stranger—our little village—you wouldn't understand. The hat, Alvin—one you didn't buy—No. 41,530—it's the winner. Won a thousand. But no sale, and course I can't sell it now. So I'm sending check to—to—"

Now from gray Ichabod's face had been going whiter and white, and his tongue was losing its sureness. Suddenly he put out his hand, trying to reach the desk. It was the girl who got to him first.

"The beast shot him," she said to the others. "Don't you see—his arm—the blood! Oh, quick, quick, please—a doctor! I can't let him—suffer!"

"Suffer?" ejaculated Ichabod in the smallest of small voices, and although that was his limit for just then, he smiled as he let his eyes close. Such a quaint notion of suffering!

Heart to Heart Talks



By the Editor



SOMETIME ago it was suggested in this column that it might be an interesting psychological study to investigate the incontrovertible fact that many of the detective-murder-mystery stories, as well as some of the best, were written by women. We think we have hit on a good, if not the only, psychical explanation of this interesting phenomenon. The perennial interest in stories of this type, we think, are directly traceable to the persistent curiosity latent in human nature. Philosophers may continue to wrangle among themselves as to whether man is a reasonable or an unreasonable animal. But against all contention and contenders, the fundamental curiosity of his nature asserts itself. And if this type of story stems back to this pronounced instinct of the race, it is patent why women should excel in this field of fiction, since they are rightly said to be the most curious of our kind. If necessity is called the mother of invention, curiosity is the father of discovery.

To prove our point that some of the best detective stories in recent years have been written by women, we are offering

TWENTY-SIX CLUES

BY ISABEL OSTRANDER

Author of "Suspense," "Between Heaven and Earth," "Mystery of the Poison Pen," etc.

in five parts. The first instalment opens in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY, and we confidently predict for this story an enthusiastic reception and a wide-spread appreciation. Pigs is pigs and Huns is Huns, but the art of a detective story makes all the difference between *Deadwood Dick* and *Sherlock Holmes*. And Isabel Ostrander, as the readers of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY must know, is a supreme artist when it comes to mixing the elements of a ripping detective story. The plot of "TWENTY-SIX CLUES" is as baffling as life itself. Just as you have definitely decided you are at last on the right track, and you have discovered the motive as well as the man, further developments force on you the unwilling conviction you are as dense and precipitate as Inspector Druet himself. In fact, all the very latest scientific and laboratory tests are shriveled to fragments by the native common sense of a self-possessed Irishman. But we will leave you to test your own perceptions in the white flame of Isabel Ostrander's captivating story.



HUMOR is the leaven of the world. Without it life would scarcely be worth living, and certainly it is the sense of it that keeps a people or an individual sane and wholesome. Without this saving sense - this balance-wheel - one will

degenerate into gross materialism, brutal selfishness, and insane egotism. Is it not fair to say, therefore, that the gentle humorist performs the greatest service of any writer? Most any brute can cause sorrow, but the real mirth-maker is a

rare article, especially in the writing game; consequently, when we get a story that, like

MR. BOLINGBROKE, PROPRIETOR

BY WILLIAM CHARLES LENGEL

simply teems from beginning to end with a quiet, kindly, but none the less sparkling humor, we are quite delighted. Being the sort of story it is, its effectiveness depends entirely on the way it is told, hence it would be worse than useless to try to convey any idea of what it is about, so we will only say that it is the complete novelette for next week, and that we only hope you will enjoy it as much as we did.

As the documents pile up, proving beyond all possible controversy the unspeakable savagery of the super-Hun of modern Germany, two hemispheres stand a moral and military unit to stamp out forever this ghastly evil that has made the world an unfit place for decent people to live in. Official documents and photographic records have revealed a depth of infamy which has rightly earned for them the epithet of "The Huns." But until you read Egbert R. Morrison's astounding story, "THE MAD APE OF VERDUN," you have not yet sounded the depths of German "kultur." This is in no sense a war story, and if your emotions are apt to run to concert pitch, by all means avoid this story, which is calculated to leave an indelible impression. If you can digest strong meat, look for it in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

THE gambler that is innate in all of us, unsuspected and very often inarticulate, is strikingly betrayed by our national propensity for "taking chances." Since every one in America, from Senator Oracle to the black-eyed urchin from Italy who "shines" his shoes, is ready to take a chance "once," and most girls take one, and some women several, life chances, it is natural that pretty Nell McNulty should take a chance on the "parlor rat" that blew so breezily up to her operator's desk at the Hotel San Blaine, especially as her "steady" gave her "a tip" and "the rat" himself persisted in nibbling the cheese. Of course, it is obvious that Nell baited the trap, but why and where and how she chose to put it in an oculist's office—these are her special secrets, and Suzanne Buck, who is Nell's sponsor, will tell you all about it in next week's magazine. This clever tale is called "WHAT DO YOU SEE NOW?"

We have all been educated on the axiom, "knowledge is power." The rank and file of the laboring people still believe education is the magic formula which will deliver any man from the yoke of hard work. Elwood Brown's hero, in "KNOWIN' THE LAW," prided himself on his

legal learning, and the law was his daily meat and drink. Incidentally, of course, he owned a garage; but the law was his divinity, and he was its sworn servant. Knowledge of the law was to deliver him out of the house of bondage, but in the critical moment (we think you will agree with us) it betrayed him cruelly, and left him to the mercy of— But you can get this very amusing tale in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

NEXT week we are publishing the first of a series of short stories, under the heading, "KINIGAN OF THE ISLANDS." The first tale is called "A MATTER OF HONOR." Olive Wadsley, the author of these stories, has found an engaging hero in Kinigan, the missionary, out of whose South Sea Island experiences these stories came to light. If you are tempted to raise a questioning eyebrow at the mention of missionary, let us tell you the current fiction that professors and preachers are peopless, impracticable people has been punctured for good by the war, and we think you will agree with Captain Courlace that this preacher in particular was every inch a human. The captain was rather inclined to patronize Kinigan until his own evil past and his son— But you will get the detailed report of this affair in next week's magazine.

WITH THE COLORS

We have had a good many letters in the last few months asking pointedly "What has become of so and so?" "Where is such and such an author?" "Why doesn't Blank give us another of his splendid stories," *et cetera, et cetera*. Doubtless the list that follows of ALL-STORY WEEKLY writers who are at present in one or another branch of the service will satisfactorily answer many of these questions. The list is not complete, for doubtless many have gone without notifying us directly, but so far as we are informed this is the

ALL-STORY WEEKLY'S HONOR ROLL:

Lieut. Frank R. Adams	Eric Levenson
Max Brand	Lieutenant Gerald Mygatt
Captain Edgar Rice Burroughs	Kenneth McNicol
Major Wolcott LeClear	William Slavens McNutt
Beard	Captain William B. Melony
Thomas J. Betts	Elmer Brown Mason
Patrick Casey	Mann Page
Frederick Faust	Basil G. Partridge
Captain Walter Archer	Wm. MacLeod Raine
Frost	J. L. Schoolcraft
Frederick Fenger	Arthur Tuckerman
Harry Irving Green	Harold Titus
Dr. J. U. Giesy	Sabine Wood
Robert Horton	Charlie Wood
Second Lieut. John Holden	John Fleming Wilson
H. A. Lamb	

LIKES HISTORICAL STORIES

TO THE EDITOR:

Without being presumptuous, I want to write you a few lines as a reader of both the ALL-STORY WEEKLY and *The Argosy* magazines. I wrote you about eight or nine months ago, asking for more historical stories, or stories located in the past, and I see that the question is now being agitated in *The Argosy*, of which I am very glad. I have noticed numerous requests in the log-books of both magazines for stories of this character, and I do not think I am alone in liking such stories. I was very glad when "The Sword Lover" ran, and also "Black Wolf of Picardy" and the Egyptian tale, and I was commencing to think you were getting back in your old stride again, but after that you relapsed to the present period, and I was about to stop taking *The Argosy* when another historical story was commenced. I do not want to be hoggish and ask that all the stories you print be along my favorite lines, but would like to have at least one or two of the five of that nature. For the rest, you can run Western stories, detective stories, sea stories, and any kind of an adventure story, and I think all will be satisfied.

I would like to see again the days of yore, when stories of the past were predominant. I think there are many readers who will agree with me that they desire a revival of this class of stories, and also stories of thrilling adventure located in wild lands. The great trouble nowadays is that it is so easy to write stories of adventure located in the country or a large city like New York that writers do not care to take the trouble to write of other countries.

As for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, I was more than gratified to see Bedford-Jones return to the ranks of contributors to that magazine. Keep him going all the time with the other favorites—Ben Ames Williams, Brand, Gregory, Hawthorne, Stilson, and the many other old and new favorites who make this magazine so popular. Also kindly let us have a historical tale along with the other good stories. I was particularly pleased to see you begin a series of stories by Marjorie Bowen. In my opinion, she is head and shoulders above most of the writers of historical novels of to-day, and that opinion is shared with many others. Let us have more of her mysteries of old London and other writing by her.

Yours sincerely,

RICHARD DALLAS.

Baltimore, Maryland.

A SEQUEL TO "POLARIS" IS COMING

TO THE EDITOR:

Please find enclosed one dollar and twenty cents to cover purchase price of six issues of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, dating from the third issue of February of this year to the second issue of

March, 1918. Please give your usual prompt service on this matter. Regarding the ALL-STORY WEEKLY letter section, I have written quite a few letters to this section quite frequently, and you may consider me a nuisance. If you find me so, just drop a line and I will discontinue. I am eagerly awaiting another story by the author of "Palos of the Dog Star Pack"; that one was great. Give him my compliments, and tell him to give us a story about Venus and Mars, or a planet of another solar system. If the authors with a taste for the strange and weird could use their imaginations on the solar systems, we would have some wonderful stories. Have the author who wrote "Finders Keepers" hurried on with another of those possible stories. That one was unsurpassed. Let us have more by Burroughs. I believe it is about time that Burroughs woke up, and came across with one. Keep the good work up, and regard yourselves as life-savers.

Yours, for the Fourth Liberty Loan,

FRED JAMES RUHL.

168 National Avenue,
Detroit, Michigan.

MOST INTERESTING AND INSTRUCTIVE

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been a constant reader of yours, the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, for a year or longer. My "sticktoitiveness" in regard to that magazine has been due only to the fact that its contents are the best, the most interesting, and the most instructive of any magazine I have ever read.

I have been accustomed to getting my reading matter from the news-stand in my home town, but its dealer has notified me that hereafter it must be through subscription owing to the fact that he will soon be called to the colors, and will not submit a subscription.

The letter that I write now is meant merely as a note of appreciation and thanks for the interesting reading matter you have made it possible for me to obtain. I have always been a great reader.

With best of good wishes for you and yours, I am,

B. LUTHER ROGERS.

Bennettsville, South Carolina.

"BOTH FINE—NOTHING BETTER"

TO THE EDITOR:

I read *The Argosy* regularly, and the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, too. They are both fine—nothing better. I read all the short stories and novels, and most of the serials. E. K. Means's negro stories are great; the only trouble is they do not come often enough.

Some of the readers who are eternally kicking deserve not to get the magazine for a month or so. Even if they have a kick coming, they don't need to tell the other readers about it.

"Don't tuck your trouble in my pocket; it's got a hole in it." That line expresses my senti-

ments, and probably those of a majority of the readers of *The Argosy* or *ALL-STORY WEEKLY*.

Well, I guess I've raved about long enough, so, wishing *The Argosy* and *ALL-STORY WEEKLY* long life and success, I'll ring off.

Yours respectfully,

C. A. K.

Riverside, California.

LITTLE HEART-BEATS

Enclosed find two dollars for renewal subscription to the *ALL-STORY WEEKLY*, which expires with the September 7 issue. A year ago I subscribed to the *ALL-STORY WEEKLY* as a birthday present to my husband. Never have I given him so valuable a present, in his estimation. We are especially fond of Samuel G. Camp, Frank Condon, and E. K. Means stories.

Sincerely,

Parrottsville, Tennessee. MRS. J. B. JONES.

I just read "The Orchid and the Hollyhock," by Nalbro, Bartley, in the August 31 issue, and, believe me, it certainly has class. Why, if the third chapter was printed on the inside walls of insane asylums it would cure the nuts. It would make an I. W. W. buy Liberty Bonds. It would make an anarchist eat candy, and a chronic grouch buy his wife presents and subscribe for the *ALL-STORY WEEKLY*. Send a copy to the boys "over there."

E. O. N. DE FRANCHEVILLE.

San Francisco, California.

Enclosed find two dollars for three months' renewal to the *ALL-STORY WEEKLY* and *The Argosy*. We are very much pleased with the stories lately, and were so glad to see "Koyala the Beautiful" "come back." We are hoping that she will prove to be something besides a half-breed, and that *Peter Gross* will win her, but am afraid that *Grace* will get him. "The Listener" listens good. We have Hooverized on everything else, but can't give up the *ALL-STORY WEEKLY* and *The Argosy*.

Yours truly,

R. S. KEITH.

Pratt, Kansas.

Enclosed find ten cents in silver, for which send me the *ALL-STORY WEEKLY* for September 7. Have only been taking your magazine a short time, and like it fine. Let us have some more of E. K. Means's stories. Was certainly glad to see a sequel to "The Argus Pheasant." With best wishes, I remain,

WILEY MCGEEHEE.

Seneca, Missouri.

Having read "The Moon Pool" in the *ALL-STORY WEEKLY*, June 22, 1918, I have become

very much interested, and take this means of securing a few more facts concerning it. Is the story really true? In what part of the world are those islands? Did *Dr. Goodwin* undertake the journey? Has he been heard from? Is he successful? What is the Moon Pool? What is your theory? I would like very much to hear the results of *Dr. Goodwin's* experiment.

DAISY B. GREENE.

1207 Taylor Street,
Richmond, Virginia.

Enclosed find ten cents, for which please send me the *ALL-STORY WEEKLY* for July 31, 1918. I have read the *ALL-STORY WEEKLY* for five years, and think there is no magazine like it. All the stories are good, and I read the magazine from cover to cover. I don't seem to be able to get the copy of last week's *ALL-STORY WEEKLY*, so would like to have you send it to me. With many good wishes to your magazine, I am,

MRS. B. M. SHADDRICK.

648 Ontario Street,
Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Enclosed find post-office money order for two dollars for six months' subscription to the *ALL-STORY WEEKLY*. Best magazine I have ever read. Please give us more by Achmed Abdullah, "Master of the Hour," *et cetera*. He is the best writer of foreign stories I have had the pleasure of reading.

H. POPKIN, JR.

Winnsboro, Louisiana.

Please find enclosed three dollars, money order, for which please extend my subscription to the *ALL-STORY WEEKLY* for nine months, beginning with the October 19, 1918, issue, as my subscription expires with the October 12 issue.

I wish to voice my appreciation of the fine stories now running, but wish to ask when that Burroughs story is coming. Your best writers, in my opinion, are: J. Gregory, E. R. Burroughs, Ben Ames Williams, Bedford-Jones, and also several others. "The Texan," by James B. Hendryx, also promises to be good. Hoping to receive the magazine promptly, as of old, and wishing you the best success, I remain,

Yours truly,

NORMAN T. HARKINS.

6 Larchmont Avenue,
Penfield, Pennsylvania.

Have just got this month's bunch of magazines. They look good to me, just like old friends. Means and Max Brand are some of the best. They are all good. The *Wuggles* stories are great. Am sending you a dollar to keep them coming. Please print the little note I sent you before, also this, if you have space and wish, and oblige,

DEVAN FITZGERALD.

Hickman, Arkansas.

"Battling Against a Hun."

What was this mysterious thing that made monsters out of innocent young girls—that made every mother clutch her baby to her breast in nameless terror? What was it that drew strong men trembling into the

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